

The Reason for All Wars

[Andy Blumenthal](#)

Only the cruelest person remains unaffected by war. The one now taking place in Ukraine is particularly galling. How should one understand the needless killing of thousands of persons, the uprooting of millions, the daily cruelty and perversity? A war between two countries that, until now, were united by blood, by family? Many observers believe that, notwithstanding Putin's assertion that his country was being encroached upon by NATO, he would have carried out this insane aggression against Ukraine anyway. However, rather than launching a brutal war, he could have begun by suddenly cutting the flow of Russian gas to Europe, thus forcing the conditions for a diplomatic engagement. But Vladimir Putin, a small man with big ambitions, wanted something more to fulfill his lifelong dream of retaking territories lost after the dissolution of the Soviet Union and recreating the Russian Empire. While claiming that Russia and Ukraine were sister nations, he started the systematic ravaging of that country. A peculiar way to treat a family member. What he has achieved is not a quick victory but rather enormous loss of life and treasure for both countries that will take generations to recoup. Of one thing we can be sure. Because of the incredible heroism of the Ukrainian people, when this madness ends, Ukrainian flowers will again bloom through the ashes.

The following poem by Carlos Duguech, an Argentinian poet, political analyst, and creator of the radio program Peace in the World, reflects the feelings of all peace-loving people in the world.

Nor

The dull white of bones;

nor the still gaze of the dead;
nor the hopeless brown
of all the blood
now defeated and abased;
nor the clangor of the iron gunners;

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nor the insolent whistle of the bullets;
nor the speeches of the conquerors;
nor the others' relentless yes-sirs;
nor the rags raised as flags

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of a white, forlorn surrender;
nor the ostentatious signatures of those who sign as gods,
the instruments of surrender of those who lose,
who always lose;
nor the newspaper pages that make haste to write
headlines full of vain homages
to those who win

while they corner, oh shamelessness of the trade,
those who lose, who always lose;
nor medals of gold or silver
or bronze or of coarse gold plating
that they pin on the breasts of battle heroes;
nor the new ranks that are added and added,
from death to death;
nor the prayers that no gods answer,
busy as they are with just being gods;
not even remorse,
nor the traumatized conscience
of the survivor of so much death,
of the sordid and smoking trench,
of so much flesh defiled by shrapnel.
None of that, nothing,
absolutely nothing,
will be of use when the time comes
that you ask

the reason for all wars.

Carlos Duguech

(Translated from the Spanish by D.P. Snyder)

César Chelala is a co-winner of an Overseas Press Club of America award for the best article on human rights.

Gender-Based Violence in Iran

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Thousands of women in Iran have taken to the streets, courageously removing their hijabs in solidarity with Mahsa Amini, a 22-year-old woman, who was arrested by the Iranian police and allegedly murdered for wearing her hijab in an “improper” way. Since then, hundreds of those women have been killed for protesting the government’s crackdown on women’s rights.

In a recent interview with Amna Nawaz on the PBS NewsHour, Nazanin Boniadi, an Iranian-born actress and human rights activist, quoted Iranian actress Katayoun Riahi, who said, “People are no longer fearful of prison, because Iran itself has become a prison.” Those femicides are part of an ample spectrum of gender-based violence that is still widespread in the world.

Gender-based violence (GBV) is a global pandemic that affects the lives of one in three women. GBV may take many forms, including domestic violence, sexual violence and trafficking, and psychological and emotional violence. Forced child marriages, honor killings, and femicides are part of this spectrum of violence. According to the United Nations, "It is rooted in gender inequality, the abuse of power and harmful norms." Although the majority of the victims are women, men and gender-non-conforming individuals also experience this kind of violence.

Domestic violence, the most common form of gender-based violence, is not, of course, a new phenomenon. Before the pandemic, it is estimated that 243 million women and girls (aged 15-49) worldwide had been victims of sexual or physical violence during the previous 12 months, in most cases perpetrated by an intimate partner. That number significantly increased during the first couple of years of the pandemic when lockdowns were instituted. According to a UN survey concluded in September 2021, nearly 7 in 10 women said domestic violence increased in their community since the start of the pandemic, when lockdowns were instituted.

Domestic violence is vastly underreported. According to UN estimates, less than 40 percent of women who are physically abused at home seek help. During lockdown periods, victims may be too scared to call the police for fear their abuser can overhear them. UN Women has called violence against women "the shadow pandemic," and António Guterres, the UN Secretary-General has said, "Peace is not just the absence of war. Many women under lockdown for #COVID19 face violence where they should be safest: in their own homes."

Gender-based violence provokes an array of physical and psychological consequences such as body injuries, gastrointestinal problems, sleeping and eating disorders, chronic pain, sexually transmitted infections (STIs), and

miscarriage and unwanted pregnancies. Psychological consequences include depression, lowered self-esteem, suicidal thoughts, alcohol and drug abuse, and post-traumatic-stress-disorder that can last for a lifetime. However, as noted actress, writer and model Cody Kennedy stated, "Don't judge yourself by what others did to you."

The global cost of violence against women had been estimated at \$1.5 trillion, a figure that is bound to increase as the pandemic continues. According to the *American Journal of Emergency Medicine*, the number of domestic violence cases rose by 25-33 percent globally in 2020 compared to 2019. The United Nations group UN Women reports that incidents of domestic violence during the pandemic increased 300 percent in Hubei, China; 25 percent in Argentina; 30 percent in Cyprus; and 50 percent in Brazil.

The release of inmates from prisons –which have become a hotbed for the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic— worsens the situation. When some inmates are released, they recreate at home the conditions of violence that landed them in prison. That is why family victims should be notified in advance about the release of inmates, and local governments should implement preventative and support measures to avoid dire consequences.

One possible solution would be implementing laws that prioritize women's safety and bring about harsher punishment against perpetrators of these crimes. Governments should increase public-awareness campaigns, increase funding for women's organizations, and create more opportunities to foster women's economic independence. All officials, including medical and paramedical personnel should be better trained to offer adequate support. Violence is a choice, and it is preventable. Prevention cannot be a short-term effort but a long-term commitment.

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These are trying times for women's rights worldwide, as recent events in Iran demonstrate. But they are also a chance for change and improvement. The ultimate perversion is when the government, as in Iran's case, is the perpetrator of violence against women, an action for which it has been condemned worldwide. A statement in Farsi widely circulated in social media says, "FROM NOW ON– Know Iran by its women– not by its carpets, saffron and cats."

Women in Iran today are not only protesting for the right not to wear the hijab, they are protesting against a government that has curtailed their most basic rights. Elahe Massumi, an Iranian filmmaker banned from reentering her country, told me, "If I were in Iran, I would go to the streets and join those women who are dying for freedom. I am proud of these women and proud of being an Iranian." By brutally targeting women, and carrying out against them the most brutal acts of violence, the Iranian regime may have provoked its own undoing.

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About the Author

César Chelala is a physician and writer born in Argentina and living in the U.S. He wrote for leading newspapers all over the world and for the main medical journals, among them The New York Times, The Washington Post, The Wall Street Journal, The Japan Times, The China Daily, The Moscow Times, The International Herald Tribune, Le Monde Diplomatique, Harvard International Review, The Journal of the American Medical Association, The Lancet, Annals of Internal Medicine, and The British Medical Journal. He is a co-winner of an Overseas Press Club of America award and two national

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