

A note from the playwright on *Enemies: Foreign and Domestic*

“Enemies: Foreign and Domestic” is inspired by the notion of two secret wars. It juxtaposes US secret conflict abroad and secret “domestic” violence in a US home. I was inspired to write the play after reading an article called “Obama’s Secret War in Somalia, Where Americans are Creating a Monster.” It intrigued and infuriated me that a defense contractor providing mercenaries to the US in Somalia is classified as a 501-c 3, and calls itself “non-governmental organization dedicated to finding permanent solutions to violent conflict.” (Using mercenaries?)

The play explores common recurring patterns of violence and shows how they affect four women – all of whom are victims of violence, but who respond in different ways.

Two repeating patterns – so-called “domestic” abuse and US secret wars, such as the one in Somalia – are enabled by a cluster of behaviors the characters embody onstage. These include: denial, racism/xenophobia (also forms of violence), minimization, gas-lighting, excuse-making, enforced secrecy, victim-blaming, jumping to conclusions, filtering, always being right, passive-aggression, aggression, the apathy of bystanders, and acting out the abuse cycle. These patterns also result in terrible unintended consequences for the people caught up in them. The play looks at a spectrum of violence and abuse, not a hierarchy.

In “Enemies,” many of the institutions to which people might turn for help – police, church, family, hospital, etc. – are corrupt, and thus unhelpful or downright harmful. Corruption is another way the two wars stay secret and ongoing.

So, “Enemies” juxtaposes these two secret wars. Is there is a direct connection between them? John Stuart Mill wrote of a connection between tyranny in the home and abroad, as did author Alice Miller, as did poet June Jordan. The play invites people to ask questions about the connection.

I remember watching the presentation to the UN by Colin Powell on Iraq weapons of mass destruction and wondering, “Is the world being gas-lighted, in an effort to make us crazy enough to go to war?” I also remember my shock at learning that that more US women were killed by their intimate partners since 9/11 than all Americans killed on 9/11 and in the Afghanistan and Iraq wars combined. Societal violence – homicides, and especially violence against women and children – is a bigger problem than civil wars, according to a study by James Fearon of Stanford University and Anke Hoeffler of Oxford University’s Center for the Study of African Economies. Nine people are killed in interpersonal violence for every battlefield death in a civil war, and one child is killed for every two combatants who die.

While the play evokes laughter in the incongruity and absurdity of its characters’ beliefs and actions, these serious statistics and issues underpin the action of “Enemies.” — Patricia Milton