Nothing in today’s politics suggests either the willingness or capacity to do so. That means Americans at large confront a reckoning, just as Marcella did. The population is aging; social insurance for the aged is becoming more costly; lower-income workers are ill-served by eroding employment-based benefits, and by assistance programs that do not focus on them; and those unable to work are even worse off.

“What’s crazy about this system,” as Campbell puts it, “is that Americans work hard and yet get so little help to facilitate working.” Compared to other nations, “Where the United States clearly fails is in not providing a basic level of protection to everyone.” Even though it is hard to be hopeful about coherent action in the current environment, two of her conclusions perhaps point toward room for bridge-building across the ideological chasm.

First, policymakers “like to believe that means-tested programs are designed to give a hand up, but some are actually designed in a way that keeps people down.” But second (lest that be taken as an excuse to junk social assistance), “What’s contradictory is not a market economy combined with a social welfare state but rather a system that requires work but lacks the policies that make work possible.”

It should not take the extremes of suffering endured by Marcella and her family to clarify these issues. It is an act of both social-science rigor and human grace that Campbell has drawn on the details of their lives to illuminate some larger failing at the center of contemporary America.

—John S. Rosenberg

ALUMNI

“Global Charge”

Nina Lahoud rallies support for gender justice.

Six United Nations peacekeeping missions have taken lawyer Nina J. Lahoud ’78 to some of the worst war-torn regions in recent history. There she found both devastation and inspiration.

Lahoud was in Namibia in 1989 and 1990, where she says she saw extreme “poverty and servitude” under the apartheid regime of the South African administration, and helped monitor the elections that ultimately led to independence. A few years later, in Cambodia, she was a polling-station supervisor during the 1993 election of the Constituent Assembly.

Between 1999 and 2001, she took part in UN transitional administration activities in Kosovo and what is now Timor-Leste (as East Timor was renamed in 2002), and among other duties worked on building judicial infrastructure. “Despite the horrific destruction and pillage, ethnic-related violence, grave human-rights abuses, and war-crimes violations (including massive rapes) that had been inflicted on these populations,” reports Lahoud, an Advanced Leadership Initiative senior fellow at Harvard, “most [people] were eager to support UN efforts to promote peace and reconciliation even though our progress was often slow in tackling the tremendous obstacles faced: the governing institutions were no longer functioning, the economy was in total disarray, and militias were still roaming about.”

In every country, however, perhaps most disturbing has been the plight of women. “It was apparent that women account for the vast majority of those adversely affected by conflict,” she asserts, and “there is a pressing need for serious action to be taken to arrest the spiral of pervasive violence and human-rights abuses against them if there is to be any real security.” Now on unpaid leave from the UN (she was most recently principal officer in the Asia and Middle East division of its Department of Peacekeeping Operations), Lahoud is working on an independent, private project she started in 2013 called the Gender Justice Leadership Pathway Initiative. Still in development, the project aims to “enhance opportunities for women from conflict-affected countries to obtain legal education and cross-regional mentoring and peer networking support,” she ex-

ALUMNI

Newlyweds Marcella Wagner and Dave Campbell: from joy to catastrophe

Courtesy of Marcella Wagner and Dave Campbell

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Alumna plains, “to enable them to assume critical leadership functions in their countries and be better positioned to promote gender-justice reforms during post-conflict peacebuilding processes.”

In effect, she hopes to help realize an aspect of the UN Security Council’s sweeping landmark Resolution 1325, passed in 2000, that, among other things, formally recognizes the particular impact of armed conflict on women and girls. Timor-Leste and Liberia are ideal starting points. They are part of the “fragile and conflict-affected countries” that comprise the g7+ (a voluntary association of 20 countries that are or have been affected by conflict and are now in transition to the next stage of development). Their presidents, Taur Matan Ruak and Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, M.P.A. ’71, LL.D. ’11, have both met with Lahoud and are honorary members of her project’s advisory board.

Within the last year and a half, Lahoud has gained other international support, including from the Stockholm-based International Legal Assistance Consortium (ILAC). In July, she traveled to Timor-Leste, where 11 Timorese women lawyers and judges completed the online application form to become “Gender Justice Mentees” in the pilot phase of the project’s Network of Gender Justice Mentors and Peers. Liberian officials have also expressed interest in participating in the pilot phase.

The work is incremental. “I’m very positive regarding the passion and merit and support for this,” says Lahoud. “My next challenge is the money.” So far, she has paid her own travel and other expenses, but will continue seeking outside funding.

It’s not the first time Lahoud has dreamed this big. As a Lebanese-Syrian American, she grew up in one of the few “ethnic families” in Littleton, New Hampshire. Her Lebanese grandfather opened a dry-goods and grocery store there in 1920 that has since become Lahout’s Country Clothing & Ski Shop. (She switched her name to its original spelling while at Harvard.) She credits her father—who insisted his children watch the evening news—and a few innovative teachers—who introduced a history project on Newsweek articles, for example—for giving “us a small, daily escape from that small town to the broader international world.” Lahoud studied special education as a freshman at Smith, but took a formative solo trip to Lebanon that summer of 1975, just after the start of its 15-year civil war. In her junior year, she transferred to Harvard to focus on Middle Eastern studies. In 1981, she earned a law degree and a certificate in Islamic law from a joint program of the University of Pennsylvania’s Law School and Middle East Center, and two years later joined the UN. “I was,” she notes, “the first woman appointed as a legal adviser to the head of a UN peacekeeping operation.”

Throughout her subsequent work on rule of law, development, and peacebuilding, Lahoud was always drawn to “the need for the empowerment of women”—partly because she has seen what women can achieve. Her own mentors include Noeleen Heyzer, currently the UN Secretary General’s special adviser for Timor-Leste, for whom Lahoud worked as special adviser on peace and security and rule-of-law programs when Heyzer was executive director of the UN Development Fund for Women. Heyzer advocated for Resolution 1325, and is now an advisory board member for Lahoud’s project.

Earlier, when Lahoud was a chief of staff for the UN Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo in 2000, she worked with Kosovo lawyer Nekibe Kelmendi, who had recently been appointed co-head of the administrative department of justice there. Kelmendi was helping to establish Kosovo’s judicial and penal systems. She was wearing black: in March 1999, her husband, Bajram Kelmendi, Kosovo’s leading human-rights lawyer, and their two sons had been abducted; their bodies were found a few days later. To this day, Lahoud says, Kelmendi—who later became the Republic of Kosovo’s minister of justice—“remains, for me, the ultimate heroine of peace and a source of inspiration to continue in this line of work.” Referring to the “daunting challenges” faced by the two UN peacekeeping missions in Kosovo and in Timor-Leste, she emphasizes, “while most families had faced personal tragedies, and the fate of many of their loved ones remained unresolved, they somehow managed to rise above their own trauma and have the will to work toward the broader goal of bringing greater stability and freedom to their society.”

—NELL PORTER BROWN