

# Living the Life of Srebrenica

*Adnan Rondić*





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Adnan Rondić

Sarajevo, 2015

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**LIVING THE LIFE OF SREBRENICA**

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*To my dear grandmother Selima, who lived  
her entire life following the motto "Compete  
with one another in doing good deeds!"*

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# Prologue

To write about Srebrenica in the aftermath of the events of 1995 is a demanding and responsible task. This is because Srebrenica is much more than just a geographic location where a heinous crime took place; it is the town in which, more than any other, one can see and feel the consequences of the war at every moment. It is a town that is trying to preserve its cultural memories, primarily thanks to the Mothers of Srebrenica, a group of people who lost everything during the war. It is a town where young people (born during and after the war) try to build their own lives and the life of Srebrenica, but are often left to their own devices and forgotten by the rest of the country. It is a town that should and must serve as a warning and a reminder.

It is a responsible task to write about Srebrenica. In doing so, we must be responsible towards the victims and survivors of genocide, as well as those who are searching for answers to their many outstanding questions about Srebrenica, and those who still do not know what happened in Srebrenica 20 years ago, after July 1995. But we also have a responsibility towards those who do not want to know, or who refuse to know, what happened.

Regarding what has been written about Srebrenica so far, this book is unique. It breaks the silence, and “speaks” to the reader in a special way.

This is reflected not only in the author's specific writing style and sensibility, but more so in his readiness to take three different, yet complimentary research approaches towards the topic, which, independently and together, bring about an understanding of pre-war Srebrenica, the events that occurred there during the war, and Srebrenica today which, despite everything and everyone, is trying to live on. The book is therefore divided into three chapters, to be read either separately or as a whole, to form a comprehensive picture.

The first chapter is based on the author's media missions in and around Srebrenica. These are notes made throughout the years, wherein the author, through conversations with men and women from Srebrenica and through established facts, has attempted to put together the pieces of the puzzle called Srebrenica, then and now. In fact, this chapter is a non-fictional endeavour to facilitate an understanding of the genocide in Srebrenica, with its horrific consequences (which have been felt until the present day, and will probably be felt forever), but also of life in Srebrenica today. It follows by the efforts of the people of Srebrenica as they try to rebuild their lives — while searching for their loved ones and the truth — and build mechanisms to preserve the memories of the genocide (such as the Memorial Centre). The author reveals the personal narratives and experiences of people he encountered during his visits to Srebrenica and combines them with facts that constitute the evidence of all that has happened, and is still happening there.

The second chapter focuses more deeply on the period of the Srebrenica genocide, wherein the author applies scientific discourse. Through empirical research into available materials and witness testimonies about the events of 1995, he endeavours to shed light on one phenomenon that has remained unexplored: the relationship between the media and diplomacy during the war, and at the time of the execution of the

crimes in Srebrenica in 1995. Seeing the power of the media to spread the truth about Srebrenica through his personal journalistic engagement, the author wanted to explore how much (if at all) the media used this power 20 years ago to influence world diplomacy and try to prevent the crime. This chapter is the most fact-based of the three, and is primarily pertinent to scientists and researchers as a solid foundation for further research.

The third chapter is, as its title indicates, “up close and personal”. It is the author’s homage to the people, events, and occurrences that left a profound impression on him during his visits to Srebrenica. This chapter is filled with emotions, but, crucially, it is not sentimental. This shows us how substantially the author is devoted to Srebrenica, and to what extent the town has become a part of him over the years. Srebrenica is not only a topic of his research or journalistic interest: it is much, much more than that.

To write about Srebrenica is a demanding task with a great responsibility. It means living the life of Srebrenica all the time, despite the fact that you do not actually live there. With the most sincere intentions and with his heart and mind open, the author of this book has done just that. The people of Srebrenica understand this and I am sure that readers will understand it too.

*Lejla Turčilo, PhD*



# Introduction

My first encounter with people expelled from Srebrenica took place in Dubrave, near Tuzla, in August 1995.

I believe that in those days we were not at all aware of the scale of the crimes that had been committed.

Survivors were hoping to see their loved ones. Whoever I talked to on that day in August, hoped to see those closest to them. They talked about their separation, which took place in their houses, in their yards, in Potočari. About the last words they exchanged.

They told me about the last information they had of their families, which they received from those who, as Srebrenica people would say, “got across” — those who had reached freedom.

I visited Srebrenica for the first time in 1999. Thereafter, my visits to this town became increasingly frequent.

In the beginning, although I was quite emotional, it was my job, and I paid it due diligence.

However, as time went by, these people, their destinies, courage, openness, and readiness to share with me their most difficult experiences

without reservation meant that Srebrenica began to take a special place in my life, both professionally and privately.

I particularly remember March 31 2003, and the first burial in Srebrenica.

Hayat TV, for whom I worked back then, did the only right thing: they decided to broadcast the burial of the victims of the Srebrenica genocide live.

Such a pioneering decision laid the foundations for reporting standards from and about Srebrenica.

This trend and Hayat's approach to Srebrenica-related topics endured, through continuous (not only occasional) reporting, engaged journalism, and humanitarian activities.

The first part of this book is largely a product of the media content that I produced over more than 15 years of working with Hayat TV Productions, and in the last four years at Al Jazeera Productions.

My gratitude goes to Mr Elvir Švrakić, Director General of Hayat TV, who has had a great understanding of Srebrenica-related topics all these years, and who, appreciative of my decision to write this book, enabled my extensive use of Hayat TV archives.

I am also thankful to Mr. Tarik Đođić, Director General of Al Jazeera Balkans, for his unconditional support in the creation of this manuscript.

Thanks also go to my colleague Amina Gvozden, for her selfless support in the implementation of numerous Srebrenica projects over the years, and for giving me relevant and useful advice during the production of this manuscript.



I am grateful to Lejla Turčilo, PhD, the editor of this book, for contributing her patience, time, and selflessly investing her own knowledge, expertise and experience to this book, produced under her keen sight. She left nothing to chance.

Finally, I would like to thank my publisher, the Heinrich Böll Foundation and Director of its Office in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Mrs. Mirela Gruenther-Đečević, who did not hesitate to offer her support to publish this book.

Sarajevo, May 2015

The Author



# Notes about and from Srebrenica





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*Stories about Srebrenica are stories of genocide, of suffering inflicted during the war, and of the importance of collective memories. But they are also about life, and what constitutes post-war life is, with all its difficulties, but with its beauty as well. Though these are stories about the lives and destinies of the people who lived, and who still live, in Srebrenica, they are also fact-based notes about Srebrenica, genocide, and post-war developments in this area. These notes about and from Srebrenica are non-fiction stories for all those who love Srebrenica, for those who think about Srebrenica, and for those who are living the life of Srebrenica.*

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# Srebrenica

Domavia, Argentaria, Argentum, Bosna argentaria, Srebrenica. Whatever this town was called throughout history, it was not a place that people passed through. It was a place where people came, and come, with a purpose.

There were those who came with honourable intentions, and others who came with dishonourable ones.

The presence of silver and healing waters, the vicinity of the Drina river, and the town's geographical position attracted conquerors, traders, miners and those who simply wanted to live here.

Srebrenica experienced many tribulations, which it successfully carried on its shoulders. It was conquered and then relinquished, given back to those to whom it belonged.

It went with the times, and the times went with it.

On the eve of the war in 1992, the population of Srebrenica was slightly over 36,500. Of this number, Bosniaks made up 75%, Serbs approximately 23%, and Others 2%.

# Genocide

“Will anyone in the world come and see the tragedy that is befalling Srebrenica and its residents? This is an unprecedented crime against the Bosniak population in Srebrenica. The population in this town is disappearing. Whether it is Yasushi Akashi, Boutros Ghali or somebody else who stands behind this, I am afraid it will no longer matter for Srebrenica.”

This was reporter Nino Čatić’s final broadcast, made on the evening of July 10 1995, before he disappeared in the Srebrenica genocide. His mother Hajra has not found his remains yet.

Srebrenica had a specific position throughout the war.

After Bosnian Serb Army (VRS) and former Yugoslave National Army (JNA) forces occupied a major part of Eastern Bosnia, several areas in this part of the country initially managed to defend themselves, Srebrenica included (apart from a brief period of occupation from 19 April until 9 May 1992).

During the first year of armed conflict, the biggest parts of this municipality were under the control of the Army of the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina (ARBiH), together with some areas in Zvornik, Bratunac, Vlasenica and Rogatica municipalities including Kamenica, Konjević



Polje, Cerska, Nova Kasaba and Žepa. Following a Serb offensive in March 1993, the territory under the control of the ARBiH was reduced, and the number of residents in the Srebrenica enclave increased to nearly 60,000, due to the arrival of expelled people and refugees.

Despite its extremely difficult position, Srebrenica, whose defence was led by the young and charismatic commander Naser Orić, managed to remain under the control of the ARBiH.

Living conditions were extremely difficult, because Serb forces interrupted supplies of electricity and drinking water, prevented humanitarian aid from entering, and launched continuous attacks on the enclave.

Under these circumstances, on 16 April 1993 the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) adopted a resolution that declared Srebrenica a safe area and prohibited military action. Defenders of Srebrenica surrendered the majority of their weapons to United Nations (UN) forces stationed in the town.

Nevertheless, Srebrenica's population continued to face occasional attacks by the Serb Army, and shortages of provisions, as convoys carrying food and medicines were rarely allowed to enter.

In March 1995, Bosnian Serb leader, Radovan Karadžić, ordered a complete physical separation of two of the UN-protected enclaves, Srebrenica and Žepa, demanding that unbearable conditions of total insecurity be created, without hope for further life or survival.

The Serb offensive against Srebrenica started on July 6 1995, under the code name "Krivaja 1995", when United Nations Protection Force (UNPROFOR) observation posts started falling under VRS control. The ARBiH forces defending Srebrenica found themselves under heavy fire from Serb artillery, and were pushed back towards the town.

On July 11, Serb forces led by International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) indictee, General Ratko Mladić, entered Srebrenica.

“The time has finally come to take revenge on the Turks who live in this area, after an uprising against the *dahija*” (Translator’s note: *dahija* is a Turkish nobleman), General Mladić announced to a television camera in Srebrenica’s town centre, as he ordered the movement of his troops towards Potočari.

In Potočari, chaos reigned. Tens of thousands of people moved towards the headquarters of the UN Dutch Battalion, seeking refuge.

This battalion had a mandate to provide military protection to the Srebrenica enclave as a safe area. They did not provide this, nor did they make any substantive effort to do so.

Children and women in tears stood in and around the UN headquarters. Serb soldiers separated out the men, as well as many boys, in order to take them to execution sites, where they would be killed in the following days.

According to witness testimonies, over 12,000 men and boys tried to save themselves by setting out for Tuzla and territory controlled by legitimate BiH authorities. The terrain was rugged and hilly, and the route was more than 100 kilometres long.

Of these 12,000, only around 3,500 managed to save themselves.

The others were captured and executed over the course of the next few days.

Mass executions began as early as 13 July, at the Farming Cooperative in Kravica. They continued over the next few days, mostly in the

territory of Zvornik Municipality, in Tišća, Orahovac, Petkovci, Branjevo, and Pilica.

Approximately 25,000 women and children were transported on buses from Potočari, where unbearable conditions had prevailed, to territory under the control of the Army of the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

The official death toll from these few days is 8,372. But, according to the information of the Movement of Mothers of Srebrenica and Žepa Enclaves, the real number is higher by approximately 2,000.

On 26 February 2007, the International Court of Justice rendered a judgement upon the lawsuit of Bosnia and Herzegovina against Serbia for genocide, confirming that genocide occurred in Srebrenica, and was committed by the police and military forces of Republika Srpska, but acquitting Serbia of direct responsibility for genocide.

The term “genocide” was used for the first time in 1943 by Rafael Lemkin, a Jewish attorney in Poland. It originates from the Greek word *genos*, which means kin or tribe, and the Latin word *occidere*, to kill. Hence, genocide is a crime with the intent to destroy a people: a religious, ethnic, or racial group.

The Convention on Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide was adopted by the United Nations in 1948, and came into force on 12 January 1951.

It is clear that this convention was not respected in the case of Srebrenica, neither by those who perpetrated genocide, nor those who had the means and mandate of the supreme international body to protect the enclave.

The famous phrase “never again”, coined after World War II and the holocaust, was repeated in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century.

# They did not get across

For many months after the fall of Srebrenica, many still hoped that their loved ones would return, that they would appear from somewhere. But, over time, more and more key evidence of heinous crimes would emerge.

More than 130 mass graves were initially found to be hiding the remains of those killed in the genocide. Over time, more of these graves have been discovered throughout Bosnia and Herzegovina, with the total standing at 750 in 2015.

Near Zvornik, in the village of Kamenica alone, 15 such graves were found, containing remains of some of those killed in the Srebrenica genocide.

Kamenica became known as “the valley of graves”, and the discovery of over 200 skeletons in one yard here speaks volumes about the scale of the crime.

This was one of the so-called secondary mass graves, to which remains were relocated from other mass graves in an attempt to conceal traces of the crime.

The man who has done the most — along with his colleagues — in the search for missing persons, particularly those who went missing during

the Srebrenica genocide, is undoubtedly Amor Mašović from the Institute for Missing Persons in BiH. I have spoken with him countless times, most recently less than a year ago, on the 19<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the genocide. On that occasion, as in previous years, we talked about the importance of discovering information on the locations of mass graves.

“Actually, it is the key to the solution — for people to respond to the appeals of the Institute for Missing Persons, but primarily to the appeals and imploring of family members of the missing persons in Srebrenica, or any other place in BiH. Unfortunately, there have been almost no responses. This is due to a political will existing in one part of BiH where those who are ready to provide information are considered traitors, rather than people of goodwill who are trying to help this society to finally leave the past behind. Bosnia and Herzegovina will not leave the past until it resolves the issue of its missing persons

“We know, primarily where Srebrenica is concerned — and it is stated in the judgement of the International Court of Justice — that this crime was committed by the civilian, military and police authorities of the smaller BiH entity, which means that the drawers of institutions and individuals, some of whom still perform certain functions in the government, hold information of the whereabouts of the remaining mass graves.”

On 11 July 2014, “only” 175 victims were buried. In the previous years, this figure has been known to be three times higher.

“The number of people identified from Srebrenica as we speak exceeds 500, but some families have still not mustered the courage to face the fact that we are performing burial ceremonies here today in some cases for not more than one or two bones,” Mašović notes, explaining that

many still wait for other body parts or their other family members to be found.” He continues:

“A mother is simply not strong enough to perform the funeral prayer twice — she would rather wait for all her children to be found. Let me remind you, so far 133 mass graves have hidden the remains of victims from Srebrenica. Hundreds of individual graves, the Drina and Sava rivers, then Sremska Mitrovica, Šabac, and cemeteries in Belgrade, concealed the remains of victims of the Srebrenica genocide.”

Amor Mašović told me the story of Kadrija Musić, born in 1973, and killed in July 1995. His remains were found in five mass graves: in the village of Glogova, in two graves in Zelene Jadar, and in places known as Pasmulići and Zalazje. His skeleton remains incomplete.

In one of our television interviews another pioneer in the search for the missing, Murat Hurtić, recalls the beginning of the search for the missing people from Srebrenica:

“In those first days we were only amateurs in this work, and we were not aware of the risks and perils that it carries. My first visit in the field took place near Sapna in the vicinity of Zvornik. We had information that there was a mass grave with the dead from Srebrenica in one location... The very scene... after you remove one layer of earth, you see trousers, T-shirts, sweaters. How can anyone bury people like that? Bodies were just thrown on the top of one another...” Murat says with tears in his eyes.

He continues, explaining the exhumation process:

“If we have solid indicators, we start taking photos and marking the mass graves, and we do it in such a way that not everyone can see it. Then we do a test dig and a soil examination, in order to make sure that

the mass grave is truly there. If we have compelling and clear evidence, we submit a request to conduct an investigation with the Prosecutor's Office. The Prosecutor's Office then contacts the Court, the Court issues a decision to conduct an investigation, and schedules the exhumation. Prior to arriving at the exhumation site, a police investigator assigns a number to the location, marks it and takes photos, and only then do we remove obstacles to the exhumation, such as trees or other vegetation, manually or mechanically."

One of locations to which the exhumed remains are transferred is the Tuzla Identification Centre. Emina Kurtalić, Manager of the Podrinje Identification Project, shows us around.

We are in the chamber that contains the human remains.

It is silent.

The Autopsy Room for forensic and anthropological medical analysis of the remains is on the opposite side.

Emina tells us that the identification is based exclusively on DNA analysis carried out in this centre.

She underlines that the number of identifications increased after November 2001, when this type of analysis was introduced, with the hugely important engagement of the International Commission for Missing Persons.

Emina describes the entire identification process.

She says, in a trembling voice, "Emotionally, this is a difficult job, especially meeting with the mothers. But they accept you as if you were their own, and they always make you feel welcome."

I call Hatidža Mehmedović, a mother who lost her two sons and husband, on the phone from Tuzla. I want to ask her to meet me in Srebrenica for a television interview. Her voice starts shaking when, unaware of what this could mean to her, I tell her that I am at the Tuzla Identification Centre.

She asks me, "Have they found someone from my family?"

Stuttering stupidly and rebuking myself for my thoughtlessness, I manage to tell her the reason for my call.

We meet at noon in the Potočari Memorial Centre. Hatidža tells me, "When you called, and you told me where you were calling from, it came as a shock to me. I thought you were about to tell me that they found one of my relatives."

She tells us about all the years of searching, saying, "I can't even tell you what it's like. To live for that day, when you will find the remains of your child... I don't know how to put it... But I live for that day, instead of living to welcome my wedding guests, my daughters-in-law, to see my son go to work, to have grandchildren, to be a happy mother... it's not just me who wants these things, but any mother in the whole world... And I've hoped all along, even before I went to the grave in Crni Vrh, that they would emerge from somewhere, that there were some camps where they were still alive. But there weren't any. Every day is the same, every night is the same, every second is the same. Grief is my only eternal friend," Hatidža finishes her story, in a low voice.

She buried her sons, Almir and Azmir, and her husband Abdulah on 11 July 2010.

Fazila Efendić, a returnee to Srebrenica, who lost her son and husband in the Srebrenica genocide, tells us on the same day,



“Days were passing, and I hoped that they would come, come, come, until the day I found out that people were being exhumed. I entered the hall in Tuzla, but I didn’t know that the body of my husband Hamed was there... I found that out in 2002, and he was buried in March 2003. I rejoiced — it may seem like a strange thing to say, but I did — because he came back to the site from which he went missing, where he was killed, to be buried in this spot. I hope that my son Fejzo will also be identified, and I also dread it. How I am going to survive that? Yet, I would like to live to see that happen...” And she did: she buried her son Fejzo next to his father Hamed.

On our way out of the Memorial Centre we meet Hatidža again. She wants us to remember another thing: “If there is no Bosnia in Srebrenica, if Srebrenica is not in Bosnia, then trust me: there will be no Bosnia!”

# They are coming back

Year after year, on July 9, the remains of those killed arrive in Potočari. They come in their coffins, cases with green shrouds, transported on trucks from the cemetery in Visoko, (a town around 30 kilometres from Sarajevo), where, after the identification process, the final preparations for the burial are made.

Every July, this convoy of trucks sets off from Visoko, and travels to Potočari via Sarajevo, Romanija mountain, Vlasenica, Milići and Bratunac.

Every year, Amor Mašović heads the convoy, which is escorted by police.

Once in Potočari, it enters the former Battery Factory compound, and those who are present carry out the caskets by hand, lining them up alongside each other in the former factory hall.

In these moments it is always very difficult to approach someone who has waited for so long for this moment of being reunited with their loved ones. Fikret Avdić, a young man with big blue eyes full of tears, squats in front of his brother's casket, and says, "I have found my brother, my father, my uncle. They killed everyone in my family. I don't know what to do.

It's hard for me. I was 11, and my 12,13-year-old cousin was snatched away from his mother's arms. May they be ashamed of the things they

did! Look at this," he says, pointing at the caskets, "Who could do this?" Fikret, his voice a whisper, lets out a loud sob that fills the air, and covers his face with his calloused hands.

In 2009, after that year's remains were brought to Potočari, I spoke to Kada Hotić, a woman from Srebrenica, who said,

"Trucks were arriving, and I said, 'Our folks are coming back... Long ago, they were loaded onto trucks and taken in an unknown direction. Now they're coming back... They're being unloaded.... Look', I said, 'they cannot walk.... They're all dressed in the same clothes, in green. And many of them are missing half their bodies, or they are headless or legless...' Somehow, I feel good in our graveyard in Potočari. The wind always blows, and there is a special smell, restful to the soul. I buried my brother, I buried my husband and my brother-in-law... But my Samir is still missing. Will I get the chance to bury him too? If I do, I will probably survive it. I will..."

Two years later, in 2011, Kada buried her Samir, if only a few of his bones.

One story followed another.

Akif Mujić survived the genocide. Pointing at his father's casket, he said calmly that he would bury his father.

"My father is there, number 163. Almost his entire body is there, only a bit of his arm is missing, thank God."

Hatka Bulić was burying her two sons. She sat next to the caskets of 20-year-old Mirsad and 22-year-old Rešid. "Alas, to see them coming today... Headless..." she said.

Every year, on July 11, the caskets are transferred to the *musallha* (Translator's note: a place designated for prayer), in the central part of the Memorial Centre, which was designed for religious ceremonies.

One image from the *musallah* is etched into my memory.

It is of a young woman, kissing a casket and sobbing, "My dear Kadir, my beautiful sunshine... Your sister loves her little brother..."

Her mother comforts her, saying, "Don't do that, daughter. Your tears hurt him."

# Potočari Memorial Centre and Cemetery

“The Memorial Centre belongs to the state of Bosnia and Herzegovina. This is the only piece of land that is Bosnia and Herzegovina in the whole of Bosnia and Herzegovina, and it is composed of Republika Srpska, the Federation of BiH, Brčko District and the Potočari Memorial Centre, which is the only entity under its jurisdiction. And somehow, when the High Representative, Mr. Schwarz-Schilling, issued the decision stating that Memorial Centre belonged to the state institutions, and that it fell under the State’s jurisdiction, we, the victims, were in a way happy, because we had at least received some sort of satisfaction. Those who committed genocide cannot manage that.”

These are the words of Nermina Dautbašić-Muminović, a young girl from Srebrenica who returned after graduating from university in 2006.

The Potočari Memorial Centre is important to the survivors of the Srebrenica genocide for many reasons.

The struggle for the murdered Bosniak boys and men to be buried on this site was long, difficult and uncertain. It was led by Srebrenica women, members of the Movement of Mothers of Srebrenica and Žepa Enclaves, with Munira Subašić at its head.

The initial idea of BiH authorities was to have a memorial centre and cemetery in the territory of the Federation of BiH, in the location of Ravni Stanovi, near Kladanj. However, Srebrenica women, members of the aforementioned association thought that a decision on the burial location must be made by those whose loved ones were killed in July 1995.

They decided to conduct a major survey among those expelled, who were mostly concentrated in the Tuzla and Sarajevo regions at that time. It was a difficult job, with many limiting factors, primarily financial ones.

The result was predictable: over 83% of respondents wanted to bury their dead in the location where they saw them for the last time, at the spot where the boys and men were separated from the women and children: in Potočari.

Zumra Šehomerović remembers this enormous undertaking, with challenges coming from all sides. She also recalls a few questionnaires that had parts of the text crossed out and words inserted by hand, such as, "My son is alive", or "My brother is alive". Some people still believed and hoped that their loved ones had not been killed, and that although years had passed since they went missing, they would emerge from somewhere.

Zumra reveals this in detail, on one occasion when we travelled together from Sarajevo to Srebrenica.

Nermina Muminović saw her father for the last time in the vicinity of today's Memorial Centre.

"My father left carrying a green backpack over his shoulder, with all our documents inside. He said, 'Let me take this with me, it'll be alright, I'll be here.' We spent two nights in Potočari below the Zink factory. Those

were nights of horror, I remember that. During the day everything was normal, people walked up and down the street, but at night... shrieks would suddenly come from somewhere," Nermina recalls. Eighteen years later, she buried her father in Potočari cemetery.

For survivors, Srebrenica in July 1995 cannot be separated from Potočari. It is where the last encounters with their loved ones took place, where the genocide and the ethnic cleansing began. And now it is where they reunite with the remains of their relatives.

Consequently, it was with a great relief that they received the decision of Wolfgang Petritsch, the High Representative of the International Community in BiH, on 25 October 2000, confirming Potočari as the location of the cemetery and memorial for genocide victims.

Several months later, in May 2001, also by a decision of the High Representative, the Srebrenica-Potočari Foundation was established, comprising a memorial and cemetery, with a view to building and maintaining this compound to commemorate the Bosniaks killed during the genocide.

Paddy Ashdown, another High Representative, made the decision to attach the former Battery Factory to the Memorial Complex. This area was used by the Dutch Battalion of the UN prior to the fall of Srebrenica, and tens of thousands of refugees sought safety within it on those days in July 1995.

Eventually, on 25 June 2007, High Representative Christian Schwarz-Schilling made a decision whereby the Srebrenica-Potočari Memorial Centre and Memorial and Cemetery for Genocide Victims — which is the official name of this institution — was placed under the jurisdiction of the state of Bosnia and Herzegovina, with the State Investigation and Protection Agency (SIPA) in charge of its security.

On 11 July 2001 the cornerstone was laid for the building of the Memorial Centre.

*The Memorial Centre consists of sacral and memorial components. The sacral part where the burial of identified persons is performed was completed in the first stage of decorating the Potočari Memorial Centre. The most conspicuous object in the sacral part of the Memorial Centre is the Musallah. The Musallah serves as a facility for praying in the open for Muslims. In its marble plateau there are symmetrical parts engraved for Sajdah, and on its right side is a stone mimber. On the right-hand side of the Musallah is a turbe (Translator's Note: a domed burial site), with a green cupola and a large stone plaque with lines 154-156 of Surah II of the Quran engraved in Arabic and local languages:*

*And say not of those who are killed in the Way of Allah:*

*"They are dead!" Nay, they are living, but you perceive (it) not!*

*And we will surely test you with fear and hunger and loss of wealth and lives, and crops.*

*But give good tidings to those who patiently preserve, who, when disaster strikes them, say, "Indeed we belong to Allah, and indeed to Him we will return."*

*The Musallah and turbe, semi-circular shaped, are surrounded by a white stone platform, which represents the Wall of Memories and has the names of 8,372 genocide victims inscribed upon it. Another conspicuous object within the sacral part of the Potočari Memorial Centre is the Museum of Genocide, which exhibits photographs by Tarik Samarah. These photographs depict the search for missing persons and mass graves, as well as the process of identifying and burying victims. The remaining space of*



*the sacral part is filled with seemingly infinite rows of white marble tombstones, below which the rarely complete remains of victims have been laid to rest.*<sup>1</sup>

On 31 March 2003, a funeral prayer was performed and the first burial took place in Potočari. Six hundred of the dead found their final rest that day.

The next burial took place the same year, when the remains of 282 Bosniaks were interred.

The same year, on 20 September, former US President Bill Clinton officially opened the Memorial Centre for the burial of another 127 victims of the Srebrenica genocide.

At the beginning of his speech, Clinton thanked the families of those killed for inviting him to Potočari:

"I am grateful to the families of the victims who invited me to join you at this sacred moment of remembrance. We remember this terrible crime because we dare not forget because we must pay tribute to the innocent lives, many of them children, who were snuffed out in what must be called genocidal madness. Srebrenica shattered the illusion that the end of the cold war would sweep away such madness. Instead, it laid bare, for all the world to see, the vulnerability of ordinary people to the dark claims of religious and ethnic superiority. Bad people who lusted for power killed these good people simply because of who they were. They sought power through genocide. But Srebrenica was the beginning of the end of genocide in Europe. It enabled me to secure NATO support for the bombing that led to the peace that put Bosnia and Herzegovina

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1 This description of the Memorial Centre was retrieved from: <http://www.potocarimc.org>

back on the long road to a normal life... In the Holy Quran the Prophet says that Allah put different people on the earth not that they might despise one another, but that they might come to know one another and learn from one another. In the Christian New Testament, Jesus says that all the law comes down to this: that we must love the Lord with all our heart, and love our neighbours as ourselves... May God bless the men and boys of Srebrenica and this sacred land their remains grace.”

Advija Ibrahimović, a young woman who lost her mother and father, also spoke that day in Potočari. She described her memories of 11 July 1995:

“I was only ten at the time. I stood at this very place, and, unlike today, I was scared to death. Numerous frightened children, crying mothers and overwhelmed foreigners stood next to me, and all of us together watched the hatred killing human beings. I still remember when they took my father away and his last glance cast at my interrupted childhood. In that name, today in Potočari, from this sacred place I send a message that our remembrance will never end, that the human beings among us will overcome the hatred of those who did this, and that this hatred in them will become their own doom, before which they will have no choice. Because we have the right to collective thinking. We have the right to demand that the memories of our loved ones are not forgotten. And they don’t have the right to deny us that, nor will they be able to do so.”

Advija Ibrahimović has since graduated from university, and now lives in Tuzla, but she often returns gladly to Srebrenica despite the enormous suffering and grief she experienced in the town of her birth.

The women of Srebrenica had the opportunity to meet with the former US President that day. After their meeting, I asked them what they talked about.

Munira Subašić told me, "We asked him if he could have done more. If he could have prevented genocide. If he could have, why didn't he do it? And if he couldn't have, why not? He told us that he wasn't making decisions alone... And, by the way he looked at us, by the way he behaved he was telling us, 'I could have done more, but I didn't and I am ashamed'"

Kada Hotić said she told him that she hoped that they were aware of their mistakes,

"Because, if we did not have the right to defend ourselves, and if our men did not have the right to live, then at least let our children have the right to a future."

Zumra Šehomerović recalled that when they shook hands, Clinton's were very cold. "He was probably nervous", she said, "They were as cold as ice."

Tens of thousands of people from all over Bosnia and Herzegovina attended the Memorial Centre opening. I came across Amor Mašović in the crowd.

"What we thought would never happen happened here today," he said visibly moved, with his eyes full of tears.

Funerals and burials extended throughout the rows.

The following year, in 2004, 338 persons were buried.

In 2005 - 609 persons were buried.

In 2006 - 505 persons were buried.

In 2007 - 465 persons were buried.

In 2008 - 307 persons were buried.

In 2009 - 534 persons were buried.

In 2010 - 775 persons were buried.

In 2011 - 613 persons were buried.

In 2012 - 520 persons were buried.

In 2013 - 409 persons were buried.

In 2014 - 175 persons were buried.

So far, 6,241 people have been buried at the Memorial Centre.

Of these, 1,042 were minors, and 56 were women.

The youngest victim was buried on 11 July 2013. She was a newborn, the daughter of Hajrudin and Hava Muhić. A few days before her burial, she was issued a birth certificate. The date was the same for birth and death: 11 July 1995. On her tombstone and on her birth certificate, at her mother's request, the name "Fatima" was written.

Among those buried at the Memorial Centre is a Catholic, Rudolf Hren, whose parents moved to Srebrenica from Vojvodina when he was just three months old. Rudolf is one of four Catholics who were killed in the Srebrenica genocide, but the only one to be buried in Potočari. His burial was performed with a Christian ceremony, according to the wishes of his wife Hatidža, daughter Dijana and mother Barbara, who also lost her son Ivan in Srebrenica in 1992.

In total, 230 victims of the Srebrenica genocide have so far been buried in cemeteries beyond the Memorial Centre, according to the wishes of their families.

Since 20 September 2003, when the Potočari Memorial Centre was officially opened, the ceremony at every anniversary of the Srebrenica genocide has begun in the same way: after the playing of the national anthem and raising of the state flag, the Srebrenica Inferno oratorio is performed. Its lyrics were written by the poet Džemaludin Latić, and its music by maestro Đelo Jusić. It is performed every year by the Zenica Youth Choir, conducted by Milenko Karović.

*Majko, majko, još te sanjam  
Sestro, brate, još vas sanjam svake noći  
Nema vas, nema vas, nema vas  
Tražim vas, tražim vas, tražim vas  
Gdje god krenem vidim vas  
Majko, oče, što vas nema*

*Bosno moja, ti si moja mati  
Bosno moja, majkom ću te zvati  
Bosno majko, Srebrenice sestro  
Neću biti sam...*

*/Mother, mother, I still dream of you  
Sister, brother, I still dream of you every night  
You're not here..  
I search for you..  
Wherever I go, I see you  
Mother, father, why aren't you here?*

*My Bosnia, you are my mother  
My Bosnia, I will call you my mother  
Bosnia mother, Srebrenica sister  
I won't be alone/*

The oratorio is followed by a recitation from the Quran, and the funeral prayer.

Then, coffins containing the recently identified remains are carried from hand to hand towards the burial sites.

Year after year, one testimony follows another:

“My four brothers... and my father is the fifth... they never came back... I only have my mother left, nobody else...”

“I lost my sixteen-year old son... and my husband.”

“They took my son away, from here, from Potočari... He was seventeen years and two months old...”

“All my children were killed... Six sons, two brothers, four male cousins, four female cousins... and finally, my sister was hanged. I have nobody left.”

“All the things that I survived, all the things that I lost... I lost my brother, my two nephews, my nephew’s two sons. I lost my five grandchildren, and my two sons. Yet, I am still fine, thank God... When I add it up, twenty-four of them were swallowed up by Srebrenica.”

“Today, I will bury my three sons and my brother... And I lost my daughter at home, at the beginning of the war.”

The importance of the role of the Memorial Centre is manifold. Its curator Amra Begić, who returned to Srebrenica in 2004, tells us about its mission. She is married, and is raising two children in Srebrenica: her daughter Ilvana and her son Kerim. She says,

“The Memorial Centre is not there to try or to prosecute. We are here to make sure that the real truth of Srebrenica is known, no matter how difficult it may be for some people. It is something that I am putting all of my efforts towards achieving. Unfortunately, I have to say that only

a few of Srebrenica's Serb residents come to our Memorial Centre... The cemetery is also here for genocide victims and their souls to finally rest in peace, and for us, the families to have a place where we can come to visit them, and spend some time with them, at least in this way."

Amra notes that she and her colleagues feel satisfied after every visit, and every historical class that they hold. She reminds us that this is one of very few museums in the world where employees are family members of the victims. She continues,

"We have different experiences with visitors. Different people visit us, even those who learn by chance that something happened here. There are those who come here unprepared. There are those who know what happened here. But everybody leaves with the same impression.

"It is worthwhile hearing the story of Srebrenica anywhere, but when you come to the site, pieces of the puzzle fit into a space in front of your eyes... It is from this spot that the message is sent that we should not allow an event like Srebrenica to happen again. I truly hope that something like this, which happened under the UN flag, will never happen again."

After the burials, the lines of buses and cars from all over BiH and abroad, start to leave Potočari.

In the late afternoon, after the religious ceremony and burial, one can see only a few persons at the cemetery. It is a stark contrast to the scenes of only a few hours before.

One afternoon at the cemetery I spoke with Emir Suljagić, a survivor of Srebrenica genocide. He was born in the neighbouring town of Bratunac, and spent the war in Srebrenica, where he lost his father. Emir



worked as an interpreter for the UN, and described his experience of Srebrenica in the book *Postcards from the Grave*.

After the war he worked as a journalist, and later became politically active, before joining the NGO *Prvi Mart* (the first of March), named for the date on which Bosnia and Herzegovina became independent. In this role, he worked on improving the political status and fundamental human rights of returnees to the BiH Entity of Republika Srpska.

On the warm afternoon of one 11 July, Emir spoke about Prvi Mart's mission:

"We started here and we owe our existence to the primitive, aggressive politics that was run, and is being run, by the regime in Banja Luka. Milorad Dodik created us. The only thing that I want to avoid is being caught in a dilemma about whether or not Milorad Dodik is a nationalist. The only thing I find relevant, as in the case of Slobodan Milošević, are the consequences. For years, we have had a completely pointless debate as to whether Milošević was a nationalist or not, or if he was only a pragmatist who abused Serb nationalism. It doesn't matter at all; they committed genocide. I also believe that it is completely irrelevant what the motives of Milorad Dodik and the people around him are. Between 2008 and 2012, the RS government spent 1.6 million marks, tax-payers' money, my money and yours, directly on the industry of genocide denial. And this is the only thing that matters. The initiative that started from here and the things that we are doing right now are a response to that. We're standing here, in the middle of the cemetery in Potočari. You cannot do this and expect no consequences. You cannot do this and expect impunity. This is a response from BiH citizens to the reality created with fire and sword in 1992. My uncle was buried today. The most terrible thing is the fact that I remember him better than his own kids do, because they were so small when they lost their father. We have the

chance to speak with the voices of our fathers again, 20 years later. Let us use this chance.”

Emir Suljagić has since become politically engaged again.

When it came to prosecuting those responsible for genocide after the fall of the UN safe area of Srebrenica, most cases were brought before the ICTY in The Hague, and the Court of Bosnia and Herzegovina in Sarajevo.

The Hague Tribunal issued a final judgement for aiding and abetting genocide in Srebrenica for the first time in 2004, against Radoslav Krstić, the former Commander of the Drina Corps of the VRS. He was sentenced to 35 years’ imprisonment.

In May 2007, Vidoje Blagojević was also pronounced guilty of aiding and abetting genocide, and sentenced to 15 years’ imprisonment. He served two thirds of his sentence in Norway and was released in 2012.

In early 2015, the ICTY issued a final judgement finding Vujadin Popović and Ljubiša Beara — Chiefs of Security of the Drina Corps and VRS Main Staff respectively — guilty of genocide and complicity in genocide. They were both sentenced to life imprisonment. In the same judgement, Drago Nikolić, Chief of Security of the Zvornik Brigade, was found guilty of aiding and abetting genocide and sentenced to 35 years’ imprisonment.

In April 2015, VRS General Zdravko Tolimir’s life sentence was confirmed, for genocide in Srebrenica.

The following high-ranking VRS military and police officials were sentenced for crimes in Srebrenica before The Hague Tribunal:

Momir Nikolić was sentenced to 20 years' imprisonment; Radivoje Miletić to 18; Dragan Obrenović to 17; Ljubomir Borovčanin to 17; Vinko Pandurević to 13; Dragan Jokić to 9; and Milan Gvero to 5 years' imprisonment. After entering into a plea agreement with the Office of the Prosecutor, VRS soldier Dražen Erdemović also received a five-year sentence.

Radovan Karadžić's trial before the Hague Tribunal ended in October 2014, and is currently awaiting pronouncement of a verdict and sentence, while Ratko Mladić's is ongoing. Both men stand accused of two counts of genocide: the first in six municipalities of Bosnia and Herzegovina in 1992, and the second in Srebrenica in 1995.

By early 2015, in final and binding verdicts, the Court of BiH had convicted 23 persons for crimes in Srebrenica.

The first person to be sentenced for genocide before this court was Milan Trbić, former Chief of Security of the VRS Zvornik Brigade. Trbić was initially sentenced to 30 years' imprisonment, but this was later reduced to 20.

The longest Srebrenica-related sentence pronounced before this court to date is Franc Kos' sentence of 35 years. Kos was a member of the Sabotage Detachment of the VRS Main Staff.

The Constitutional Court of BiH ordered retrials in a number of cases of persons convicted before the Court of BiH for genocide, due to the fact that it had applied the Criminal Code of BiH instead of the Criminal Code of the former Yugoslavia, which was more lenient towards perpetrators, and applicable at the time the crimes were committed.

In July 2014, the District Court in The Hague partially granted a lawsuit filed by family members of genocide victims against the state of the

Netherlands and its military forces, which were responsible (as part of the peace-keeping mission of the United Nations in BiH) for securing the UN safe area in Srebrenica at the time when genocide was committed.

The District Court found the Netherlands guilty of killing only those people in Srebrenica whom the Dutch Batallion surrendered from their military base in Potočari to the Serb forces that occupied Srebrenica on 13 July 1995. However, the Netherlands was acquitted of the murder of those who were not inside the base.

Criminal charges against Thomas Karremans, former Commander of the UN Dutch Batallion and his associates were filed by Hasan Nuhanović — who at the time of the genocide had been working as an interpreter with the Dutch Batallion — and members of the family of Rizo Mustafić, who worked as an electrician on the Dutch military base.

In 2013, a Dutch court concluded that Karremans and his assistants would not be tried, and Hasan Nuhanović filed an appeal to this decision.

His appeal was rejected in April 2015.

# The march for peace – the road to freedom

I don't know how many times I've watched the footage from 16 July 1995, which was filmed on the road leading to Nezuk, free territory under the control of the Army of the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

It shows survivors from Srebrenica — having walked more than 100 kilometres over almost five days, under continuous artillery fire, avoiding ambushes, without food, and carrying the wounded — arriving in free territory.

I particularly remember the prolonged and distressing sob of a grey-haired man whose age is difficult to determine, carrying a backpack on his shoulders, and walking barefoot. "Can you make it?" two young men ask him. He brushes them off, along with the tears pouring down his face.

The wounded are laid out on stretchers made of pieces of wood, and threadbare cloth.

Their faces are thin and worn.

Their wounds are dressed with pieces of clothing.

A young woman, wearing *dimije* (Translator's Note: *dimije* are traditional Bosnian women's trousers), brings some water.

A line of people crosses a field. There are men, several women, and some children. Somebody in the line complains about the filming, and a woman says, "Film this, so that people do not forget. So that our children know what happened to us and how it happened."

And because of this desire not to forget, and for following generations to know what happened, we had the idea for the memorial project March for Peace – Road to Freedom.

Every year since 2005, thousands of people walk nearly 106 kilometres from Nežak to Srebrenica. They follow the same path that the inhabitants of Srebrenica took in July 1995, but in the opposite direction.

The March begins on July 8. Among the participants are survivors of the Srebrenica genocide, people from all over Bosnia and Herzegovina, and visitors from abroad. Over time, the March for Peace has acquired an international character, as many volunteers from the region and around the world have become involved.

Women, men, youth, the elderly, and children all come with the same wish: to pay tribute to those who did not survive in July 1995.

"I speak from my heart... When I walked this mountain in 1995, I thought nobody would ever come back," says Srebrenica survivor Muhamed Duraković. He believes that it is important for young people to come.

"There are many young people here who were either small children or who weren't even born when Srebrenica happened. They create a force, an inexhaustible source of energy — something that ensures that good people will understand this global tragedy," Muhamed says.

Among the participants in March for Peace is Rabija Džudžaljević, who was born in Vlasenica, and lost her father and 13 other members of her family there in 1992.

"I was in Vlasenica prison... Suffice it to say, I am a member of the Association of Women Victims of War," Rabija says, as her big green eyes fill with tears.

I talk with her sister Nermina, who lives in Sweden, about the recent arrest of VRS General Ratko Mladić, which took place in late May 2011. General Mladić was accused, among other things, of genocide in Srebrenica. Nermina shakes her head, "All of this is too late... They knew all along where he was hiding, where he was. The only just thing to do would be to extradite him to the Mothers of Srebrenica..."

Emina Čejvan, born in Žepče and married to a man from Bosanska Gradiška, is also here. She says,

"I can't stop thinking about the people who walked here in July 1995. I keep thinking about how they must have felt."

Mahir Subašić, a good-tempered young man who was born in Srebrenica, says that taking part in March for Peace should help people understand, many of the things that the people of Srebrenica faced in July 1995 on their way to be executed.

"After you have climbed the Udrč Mountain, you would give 100 marks for a bottle of water! Once you experience this you become aware how much you have and how much time we waste on complaining about all those stupid little things," Mahir says, and adds that he has just spoken with his friends about how important an inspiration the Mothers of Srebrenica are:

“You can’t put a life on a piece of paper... Many of those women lost their sons and daughters... They expected to become grandmothers, but that didn’t happen... But still they continued fighting, they continued living...”

Enver is from Travnik, and we have met him several times on the March for Peace. He is here every year.

“Nobody complains, nobody gives up... Nobody is hungry, nobody is thirsty, nor do they have any problems sleeping.”

In a crowd of people in a large field in the village of Mravinjci, where the participants of the March spend the night, I come across the great Mirsad Bajrović, who has headed the Subcommittee for Logistic Support for the Marking of the Anniversary of the Srebrenica genocide for many years. He says,

“I am a lucky man because dear Allah gave me the strength to do this. As long as I live, I will be here. One should go through this, experience this, learn this road, which is not easy to take even in 2011... Imagine how difficult it must have been in 1995.”

Many people from abroad participate in the March. In 2012, I met Tea Rozman Clark and Matea Jakin, women from Ljubljana.

It is Matea’s second and Tea’s seventh time to come to visit Srebrenica. Tea came to Srebrenica for the first time in July 2005, on the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Srebrenica genocide. Matea says she admires the people of Srebrenica, especially the women who lost their loved ones. “I admire their strength,” she says.

Tea completed her PhD on the topic of the relationship between members of the Dutch Battalion and the inhabitants of Srebrenica. Her first



visits to Srebrenica were for professional reasons, but, gradually, private ones prevailed.

“The word Srebrenica makes everybody think of something terrible... They don’t understand why I have come here seven times. But I met people, people who had the strength to come back, to rebuild their houses, to grow flowers...” Tea says, and looks away to hide the tears in her eyes.

Tea and Matea successfully finished the 2012 March for Peace.

Along with the March for Peace on the Nezuk-Srebrenica route, in 2013 a group of Sarajevans started a march on the Sarajevo-Nezuk-Srebrenica stretch, which is around 220 kilometres long.

Additionally, for the last several years a group of people from Žepa have walked to Potočari from Žepa, another UN safe area, which was also occupied in July 1995.

All of them arrive in Potočari in the early hours of the evening.

One can hardly describe this moment. It has to be experienced.

# The days that followed

In Dugo Polje near Potočari, on the day after the burials, I am welcomed to the Hasanović family home by Alma, a young economist, who works in the American city of Denver as a real estate manager.

She has a nice, well-paid job and good friends, but most importantly, her mother and two brothers live close by. She does not think about coming back to BiH, at least not any time soon. Alma has many options for international travel, but when she has the opportunity she chooses to return to her home town. She explains,

“I always take my annual leave in July. I couldn’t imagine myself being anywhere else on those days but in Srebrenica, in Potočari. I feel in my soul that I am with everyone who shares my destiny, that I am with the people who have gone, because I feel like myself here.”

We go together to Srebrenica’s town centre. It is a warm day during Ramadan. Alma looks at her native town from Vidikovac, a hill above Srebrenica, from which one can see the Srebrenica minarets and the bell tower of the Orthodox Church.

We walk together through the town. Alma stops suddenly, and approaches a young woman. It is her schoolmate Šejla, who just like Alma, does not live here any longer. A long, warm hug follows, along with tears and an exchange of phone numbers.

Visibly flustered, Alma continues her story,

“This very town brings back the saddest and most beautiful memories. If I could go back in time and bring back our loved ones, I would be the happiest person in the whole world.”

On her way back home, Alma stops by the cemetery in Potočari.

This is where she saw her father for the last time, on 11 July 1995.

She has not heard anything about him since, and is still searching for him.

Like Alma, many people from Srebrenica, are now scattered around the world, and have started new lives. Most of them are doing well; they go to school, and have stable, well-paid jobs.

Nonetheless, Srebrenica remains an important point on the map for them, and they keep coming back to it.

Every year on July 12, when everything is over, and most of those who attended the burial the day before have left Srebrenica, these people, as they themselves say, meet with themselves again: with what they truly are.

This 12 July 2014 was calm.

But it has not always been the case.

For a few years in a row, on the day after the burial, members of various extreme rightwing organizations would meet, wearing Chetnik uniforms and insignia. They would line up in the centre of the town, at the site where the old mosque used to be. The original mosque was destroyed after the occupation of Srebrenica, and although it was not there at the time of these nationalist rallies, it has since been rebuilt on the same site.

After meeting, these groups would go to the churchyard of the Orthodox Church.

On one occasion, I tried to talk to them to find out why they had come. The majority of them were young people, mostly from Belgrade and Novi Sad.

It was difficult, impossible to get through to them.

They kept repeating that the genocide was made up, that armed Muslims were killed in fights with Serb soldiers, and this was just a small payback for the suffering of the Serbs in that part of Podrinje, and that animal carcasses and not people were buried in Potočari.

My colleague, journalist, Nerminka Mahmić, a brave, daring woman, fiercely opposed them. I tried, as calmly as I could, to convince them of the futility of their views and actions.

There was a French woman with us, Marie, who had appeared from somewhere. Marie is an elderly woman who, despite her age, walks the entire length of the March for Peace (more than 100 kilometres) every year.

Marie had received a gift from a Srebrenica woman: *dimije* and a thin white headscarf, known as *jemenija*.

When in Srebrenica, Marie wears both *dimije* and *jemenija*.

When those young boys from Belgrade and Novi Sad saw Marie, they went mad. They started cursing and threatening to assault her and one of them sang:

*Oj, Fatima, đe su ti dimije?  
U četnika, oko redenika!*

/Hey Fatima, where are your *dimije*?

They are with the Chetniks, around their bandoliers/

Marie did not understand their words, but she did understand their hatred. Nevertheless, her carefree, almost child-like expression did not change.

The situation grew more and more dangerous. Slowly, keeping our French guest in sight, we moved away from the churchyard.

We were seen of by derisive laughter, cursing of our Turkish mothers, and chauvinistic songs.

Without changing her peaceful expression, Marie took my arm and whispered, "They scared the hell out of me! But I did not want them to see that!"

In the late afternoon of the following year, 2009, members of nationalist organisations the Chetnik Ravnagora movement and Obraz came to Srebrenica. Walking through the centre of the town they shouted,

"If necessary, Serbia alone will cleanse the Balkans of Islam!"

and,

"This is Serbia!"

In response Zulfo Salihović, a man from Srebrenica, and some girls shouted,

"This is Bosnia!"

This kind of provocation stopped in 2010, primarily due to the involvement of the US Embassy. On July 12 that year, Jonathan Moore, the then

Dispatcher of Affairs at the US Embassy in Bosnia and Herzegovina, walked around Srebrenica and Bratunac with his associates.

We joined them on their walk. Mr Moore told us that there must not be room for provocations, and that the US presence both in Srebrenica and Bratunac the day after the burials is a clear message of support to those who lost loved ones in the genocide. He added that they had received guarantees from the RS police that there would be no further problems.

In the years since, no problems have occurred. An American presence in Srebrenica and Bratunac on July 12 has also continued.

By 2012, on the day after the burials and funeral prayers in Potočari (July 12 — also St. Peter's Day, an Orthodox holiday), ceremonies were being held at the military cemetery in Bratunac to commemorate Serb victims of the war in this part of BiH.

Bosniaks from Srebrenica and Bratunac perceived this choice of date as an intentional provocation, because the large-scale capture and murder of Srebrenica Bosniaks commenced on that very day in 1995.

During one of these July 12 services in the Bratunac military cemetery, I had the chance to speak with Milorad Dodik, the then Premier of RS.

Referring to Srebrenica, he stated that "there were victims and those victims should be respected." I asked him why he did not refer to the crimes against the people of Srebrenica as genocide, as he had done previously. I reminded him that he had used the specific term "genocide", although he had mitigated it clumsily with "limited or municipal".

Dodik responded:

"No, no... I never said that. I said that I was familiar with the ruling of the Court according to which a limited genocide took place. I don't accept

that this qualifies as genocide, it is not genocide based on what I know about the definition of genocide. I cannot change the Court's decision, it is as it is. But, as far as we are concerned, the RS cannot accept that it was genocide and that it was committed on behalf of the RS. This is how the ICTY ruled, but it does not mean that all judicial decisions are fair."

When I asked him if he respected the judicial decisions or not, he replied, "What does it matter if I respect them or not? I said that I didn't think there was genocide. If there were genocide, it was committed against Serbs here in Podrinje. In this place, women and children were also killed. In this place, the elderly were also killed only because they were Serbs. Then, there was genocide here as well. If we can agree on this, or if we can accept it as a common position, perhaps we can then reach the lowest common denominator. But to say that only Serbs committed genocide and then to try to present it as a collective responsibility is absolutely unacceptable. There was no genocide."

In all of his following statements to the media, Dodik continued to deny genocide in Srebrenica, although in the spring of 2015, in an interview for Belgrade daily newspaper *Politika* he severely condemned the killing of Bosnians in Srebrenica and called it a terrible crime, where Serbs had behaved in a cowardly manner. In April the same year he went a step further, visiting the Memorial Centre and paying tribute to the victims of the Srebrenica genocide.

This denial of the Srebrenica genocide has resulted in a paradox, whereby July 11 is not officially marked as a day of remembrance in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the country in which genocide was committed. Serb representatives from the RS refused any state-level initiatives launched by the Parliamentary Assembly of BiH to issue a resolution pronouncing July 11 Remembrance Day.

Bosniaks from Srebrenica do not hide their disappointment with this stance, which is held by a number of state representatives.

"This attitude shows the realistic political situation in BiH," Ćamil Duraković, Head of the Srebrenica Municipality, stated in one of our interviews in the summer of 2010. He added that if the international community failed to impose this decision there would be no resolution, because there is no political will for it. "I do expect a change of collective consciousness. But we live in a country where this is still far, far away from us," he concluded.

Srebrenica woman Munira Subašić is not surprised by this rejection. She says,

"They will never become conscious, they will never change. If America doesn't do something, there will be no resolution in BiH for sure. And I suppose that those who are against it will muster the courage one day, and will make themselves say that genocide was committed in Srebrenica. This cannot go on: BiH is divided, politics are divided, people are divided, fields are divided, water, air..."

"These are the foundations of Bosniaks in the Balkans," Hatidža Mehmedović tells us, gesturing towards the tombstones in Potočari cemetery, "This is what tells us that genocide was committed. Bosnia and Herzegovina should have been the first country to have Remembrance Day."

"In order to have a normal conversation, we must put the truth in front of us, look it in the eye, and then, God willing, everything else will get better. Those who committed genocide don't want to talk about resolution at all, they don't want it on their agenda," says Damir effendi Peštalić, Chief Imam of Srebrenica.



A reminder: the story of Remembrance Day started on January 15 2009, when the European Parliament, at its plenary session in Strasbourg, rendered a resolution on Srebrenica, inviting all member states of the European Union and countries of the Western Balkans to pronounce 11 July as Remembrance Day for the Srebrenica genocide. This resolution was jointly proposed by all political groups in the European Parliament, and noted that it was necessary and appropriate to pay tribute to all the victims of crimes committed during the wars in the Balkans. In this document, the European Parliament called upon the Council of Europe and European Commission to pay tribute on the anniversary of genocide in Srebrenica, in support of the decision of the Parliament to pronounce 11 July as Remembrance Day for victims of the genocide.

Many countries responded to this invitation, among them the majority of those in the region.

On 31 March 2010, Serbia also adopted a declaration condemning the crime in Srebrenica, whereby the crimes against Bosniaks in Srebrenica in July 1995 were “most severely condemned, as determined in the judgement of the International Court of Justice,” but it failed to mention the term “genocide”.

This declaration provides for support to war crimes processing, encourages the process of reconciliation, and expresses the expectation that the supreme authorities of other countries from the territory of the former Yugoslavia will condemn crimes against Serb population in the same way, and send apologies and express their condolences to the families of Serb victims.

One should note that the International Court of Justice’s judgement of February 2007 found that genocide was committed by military and police structures of Republika Srpska, but acquitted Serbia of its

responsibility for participating in, being accomplice to, and aiding and abetting genocide. However, the Court found that Serbia violated the Convention on Genocide because it failed to do anything to prevent it.

To return to the resolution of the Assembly of the Republic of Serbia: It is interesting to hear what Mladen Ivanić, the President of the Party for Democratic Progress (a political party from BiH entity Republika Srpska), who at the time this book was produced was a member of the Presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina, said:

“Sarajevo does not trust Belgrade. Regardless of how much Tadić has apologised (Boris Tadić, former President of Serbia, author’s remark), made these declarations, and tried to have a proper attitude, I have the feeling that he could do it every day and still nobody would believe him.”

In 2010, President Tadić attended the burial of Srebrenica victims, after the Assembly of Serbia had adopted the aforementioned resolution.

I met him at the entrance to the cemetery. Although his escorts tried to move him away from the camera, he stopped. He said that Srebrenica was a tragedy for the Bosniak population, but also for all the people living in the territory of the former Yugoslavia.

“This is a tragedy that cannot be forgotten, but in order to reassure those whom the victims left behind, it is necessary to track down all those who are guilty and convict them. As the President, I will never give up looking for the remaining culprits. I am primarily thinking of Ratko Mladić. Only then will I consider that one part of my job is finished. Thereafter, it is necessary for people to reach out to each other, to continue living as people, as we used to live before, one with another, one next to another. Too much time has passed, and on my part I’m doing all I can. Please rest assured: I will continue doing so until the very last moment.”

Staša Zajović, a prominent woman from Belgrade, and member of the anti-war organization Women in Black, was standing nearby. She is one of very few people who does not shy from the truth. Every July 11 she comes to Potočari with other members of Women in Black. Through numerous actions, round tables and conferences they are trying to change perceptions in Serbia, with their desire and intention that the truth, particularly that of Serbia's role in the crimes committed in BiH, be disclosed and accepted.

Regarding President Tadić's comments, she said,

"We appreciate President Tadić's gesture, but we believe that this gesture is insufficient, and that it is only declarative unless followed up by very serious political and other measures. Serbia's International commitment is to extradite Ratko Mladić and acknowledge that genocide occurred in Srebrenica, and that without considerable assistance from Serbia's former regime, it would not have done. If Serbia does not do the above, it means that the previous regime continues, the regime of the crimes of Slobodan Milošević.

"We will not be satisfied with empty promises because we know that they stem from the pressure of the international community or fear from confronting political forces, not only in Serbia but also in RS, which are in favour of continuing the former regime, and who want to freeze us in a period of war, violence and hatred."

Each July, visits to the sites of the executions of Bosniaks from Srebrenica constitute an important part of marking the anniversary of the genocide.

These sites include Nova Kasaba, Kravica, Orahovac, Petkovci, Branjevo, Pilica and Kozluk in the municipalities of Bratunac, Milići, and Zvornik. These are the municipalities where mass executions took place in July 1995.

It is a result of the persistence of Srebrenica women that these visits take place. Their firm intention to place flowers and recite the *al-Fatihah* (funeral prayer) on the sites where their loved ones were executed has faced many obstacles.

It was especially difficult to secure the right to visit the Farming Cooperative in Kravica near Bratunac, where, according to surviving witnesses, almost 1,500 people were executed on July 13.

There were obstructions from local Bratunac authorities through their actions, and a lack of police cooperation. They looked for any possible reason to prevent a visit to Kravica, starting with arguments that legal procedures for obtaining a visitor's permit were not complied with, followed by the assessment that security conditions were not met due to complaints of local Serbs, and ending with the argument that the land was under private ownership, which was inviolable.

On July 15 2008, less than two kilometres from the Farming Cooperative, the RS Police stopped a bus of Srebrenica women on their way to Kravica.

There were many of us journalists on board, too, and the police prevented us from doing our job. One young police officer physically assaulted our colleague, cameraman Elmir Mulić, and tried to snatch his camera. Elmir skilfully extricated himself from this very unpleasant situation.

I asked the police officer why he did this. He started shouting at me, and I warned him that he must not do that, and that he had no right to ban us from being journalists. I asked him to tell me the legal basis for preventing us from filming and taking photos, but he continued to act high-handedly, and asked me to present my ID. I refused, because I did not see his first and last name on his uniform. I told him that I must know

who I am talking to, who is asking for my papers, whether or not he is an authorised person, and that this is required by law.

He threatened to arrest me, and I told him that I could not wait for him to do that. I noted that the war ended 13 years ago, and that I was not his prisoner, and that the spot on which I stood was mine as much as his, that it was equally a part of my country as it was of his.

He moved away from me.

A few women descended from the bus, Zumra Šehomerović and Hatidža Mehmedović among them. They talked to us journalists, without hiding their disappointment with the fact that it had been 13 years since the war ended, and they were still being prevented from visiting the spot where their loved ones were killed.

In the end, they went to Nova Kasaba in Milići municipality, in whose local stadium one of the largest-scale executions took place. Near the stadium, by the main road, a history class was held, flowers were placed and a short religious ceremony was performed.

In the following years, visiting Kravica would remain a sore spot regarding visits to the mass execution sites of those captured in Podrinje.

In 2013, access was allowed, but only as far as the entrance to the Farming Cooperative Compound.

On 13 July the same year, families of victims cut the fence, and entered the yard of the Farming Cooperative. Police tried to prevent them.

“Blood was shed here. Thousands of people were beaten and killed, and experienced all sorts of things. Eighteen years later they still don’t allow us to enter, to look at the premises, recite the *al-Fatihah*. Instead they punch us in the chest...” Srebrenica woman Kada Hotić said.

Some of the women from Srebrenica subsequently sought medical assistance for the injuries they sustained that day.

RS Police Director Gojko Vasić promised that day that if they discovered that any police officers had used force they would be sanctioned.

“But at the same time, all those who used force must expect that the Prosecutor’s Office will initiate an investigation,” Vasić said.

Police hearings of Srebrenica women began, as they were charged for violating public order and the peace.

Srebrenica women entered the Farming Cooperative compound without any problems for the first time the following year, in 2014. However, they could not enter the hangars where the executions took place.

Šuhra Malić sat in a wheelchair, in front of one of the hangars. She lost her two sons, and twelve other family members. One of her sons was killed in Kravica.

“What was their death like, here? They had hand grenades thrown at them, machine-guns fired at them... How much did they suffer before they died, thirsty, hungry...? This is what hurts me. It’s eating me alive,” she said, in tears.

Vasvija Kadić lost her three brothers and her father. She cried silently and wiped away tears with the end of her headscarf. She has buried all four of them, but said that even though she knew it was impossible, she still hoped that they would appear from somewhere.

Hasreta Tabaković lost her brothers, father and husband.

“What a disgrace, for the whole world. One cannot forget this and say it never happened,” she said, evidently upset.

There was a flood of emotions at the other executions sites as well. Traces of the crimes committed remain: ammunition cartridge cases, wires used for tying the hands of captured Bosniaks, pieces of the clothes they were wearing.

For years, the same questions have been asked: what were their last hours like? Did they die hungry and thirsty? Why were their hands tied when they were unarmed? Who were the people who killed them?

Answers to most of these questions will never be given. But, as the women of Srebrenica told me countless times: they will never stop asking them.

# Brave enough, nostalgic enough

Stories of return to Srebrenica have left a profound impression on me, both professionally and personally.

Since my first visit to Srebrenica, there have been images of return living inside me, stories of returnees, energy, power, enthusiasm; a desire to make the unimaginable not only possible, but rather the only possible solution.

With stories of return and returnees I have in a way become a Srebrenica man, although I had never even visited this area before 1999.

Associations from the past follow one another:

A returnees' tent camp in Pale and Bajramovići, villages near Srebrenica. Rows of returnees' houses in the village of Sućeska, with the best cheese pie I have ever eaten, and many joyful children.

I recall Zehra Mustafić, who, on the terrace of her house in Srebrenica vigorously conveyed the message, "I came back here alone, nobody helped me! I came back home and that's that."

The late Čamila Čamka Omanović; late Ismet Hasanović Daidža; late Mujo Siručić; late Ahmo Begić; late Osmo Šahinagić; late Abdulah Purković. All of them were special to Srebrenica in their own way, and important to my understanding of this town.



There is also an exceptional group of educated young people, young boys and girls, admirably prepared to forgo reasonably secure lives in Sarajevo, Tuzla or even abroad for the uncertainty of life in Srebrenica.

Anesa, Fija, Maksida, Emir, Amra, Adis, Nermina, Hasan, Azir, Alija, Čamil, Ado, Mediha, Mirza, Semir... it's a long list.

Omer and Džemila Spahić and their famous *aščinica* (Translator's Note: *aščinica* is a kind of restaurant serving traditional Bosnian food).

Hakija Meholjić and his peculiar way of telling a story.

The brightness of Hadji Zejneba Čengić.

Auntie Hajra Fazlić, and her endless patience and hospitality.

Šahida Abdurahmanović, who does not ask how many guests one will bring.

Zijada Halilović, the wife of well-known Srebrenica doctor Sead, who was killed during the war. She was among the first to return to Srebrenica.

Husein Alić, who has been my host for years in Srebrenica.

Vezirka Beganović, to whom I will always be thankful for boosting my spirits on a very cold night in Srebrenica, while I was reporting live on Hayat TV.

The diligent people from the Potočari Memorial Centre, with Mersed Smajlović at their head.

The quiet and ever-smiling Nermin Alivuković, with a solution for everything and responses to all my questions.

Amir Kulaglić and Amir Mehmedović Gera, because meeting them always makes me happy.

In the past fifteen years, my colleagues and I have been to many of the villages around Srebrenica, including: Gladovići, Knezovi, Kragljivoda, Sućeska, Osmače, Bajramovići, Osat, Pale, Bućinovići, Skenderovići, Skejići, Sulice, and Poznanovići.

We have also managed to reach Krušev Dol and Luke, the most remote villages in the Srebrenica area. We went to these villages with American and local doctors, who performed general health checks on their populations.

I recall the doctors being impressed by the standard of personal hygiene in these villages, particularly among elderly women, despite the difficult living conditions of returnees.

Many of the people whom I met in Srebrenica have already been or will be mentioned in this book.

Mujo Siručić is one of them, but unfortunately he is no longer alive.

Once when we talked, he recalled 1999, when he and five other people made up the Bosniak component of the Srebrenica authorities. This was at a time when Bosniak councillors were under police guard.

Mujo's wife, son and daughter returned in 2003. He explained why it was vital to make return sustainable:

"It is important both economically and psychologically. I would not say that it is particularly important from a security point of view, yet, there is an element which indicates that one should not fully trust all the segments of the authorities here. There is not a complete lack of trust, but everything that happens here in Srebrenica should be closely followed with a watchful eye."

Mujo said that to live anywhere else — Sarajevo, Tuzla, or abroad — would be to make his soul suffer.

In 2008, he told me that there was no critical mass of people who would fight for their rights, “fight for themselves, their families, their homes, or their civil rights.”

He also told me that out of 426 residents in the street where he used to live, only 14 came back.

We spoke to Mujo in the part of his house he called *Mujagin han*: a room decorated in Bosnian style, with a lot of memories of past times, and some of the people who were dear to him.

“Sometimes it is better to be with the deceased than with the living. I feel that in this way I am paying off a debt to them for what they did for me,” Mujo said. Fewer than two years after this conversation, he joined his deceased loved ones.

Avdo Sandžić from Potočari grows fruit and vegetables in his greenhouse. At the time of our visit, he was growing roses. He told us that the Dutch had given him a motocultivator as a gift.

He then told us proudly that he and his wife had sowed 350 kilograms of potatoes, and that he sold his peppers, tomatoes, onions, strawberries, and honey.

Avdo lost three brothers in the Srebrenica genocide. He came back in 2001.

“Had I not returned, almost no one would have done... They offered me money, as much as I wanted, to sell my house,” Avdo said, noting that a large number of people had returned to Potočari, despite the high number of victims from July 1995.

He said that both his brother and his nephew returned, and his nephew had since got married

“I wanted to pay my debt to the *shaheeds*, their bones... I owe them... My three brothers were killed, and then I’m supposed to give my house and property to somebody as a gift?”

His son and daughter live in Tuzla, and they often come to Srebrenica.

Although he bore a grudge against the councillors for never visiting him, Avdo said that he would support them nevertheless.

Emin Mujkić returned with his wife and son. He has a large estate of almost 6 hectares. “I had nothing over there, I lived on somebody else’s property, I didn’t even have space to build a henhouse. Here, I have everything.”

He grows vegetables, and keeps cows. “Every job pays off in its own way, but it is difficult to be profitable. We started here from scratch, but now, three or four years later, we can see the results of our persistence, hard work and sacrifice.”

Ermin discloses his recipe for success, which is a simple logic: it is important to work, and to be willing to work.

To me and my colleague Amina Gvozden, our cameramen and drivers, and later my friends in Sarajevo, and particularly to a friend in Croatia, good and dear Abdulah, the story of Elvis and Nermis Lemeš is symbolic of the story of return to Srebrenica.

The brothers returned to the village of Knezovi, near Srebrenica, when they were still boys. When we saw them for the first time, they were full of enthusiasm and the desire to stay in their home, despite the difficulties they encountered.

They had no electricity or water when they first returned. Their mother had remarried after the fall of Srebrenica, and they had lived in Visoko with their grandmother, until she died in early 1996. The boys were placed in the Centre for Abandoned Children in Zenica, and later in a children's home in Turija, near Lukavac. But, their wish to return home, although it may sound like a platitude, was overwhelmingly strong.

Their house is a solitary one.

In 2004, Elvis told us how he passed his days:

"I get up in the morning around 5, depending on the weather. If it's raining, I don't get up early, I get up around 8 o'clock. Then I let my sheep out, give them corn, and tend to them. As the sheep slowly graze, I chop some wood, feed the chicken, walk up and down a bit, and the day is over. It's boring. The worst thing is that there's nobody around. My brother is still there in Tuzla, getting medical treatment. I am here alone, and have been for almost five days. But, with sheep, a dog, up and down... the day goes by. We have a neighbour, Mevlid, down there. He's alone too, apart from his wife."

Elvis explained his reasons for returning:

"Am I supposed to let the estate and everything around here that my father left me go down the drain? The only problem is that there are no people around. Otherwise, it's nice here, there's clean air, everything. When I lived in Turija in Lukavac, I was ill all the time. I had to take medicine constantly. Once I almost died. There were infusions, equipment...

And ever since I came back, thank God, I'm not ill at all. I immediately felt different."

Over time, things changed for the better. Nermis learned a trade, and works occasionally. Elvis married Izudina in 2005.

As is appropriate, we went to meet his bride.

"I was born in Prohići, and that's where I lived before the war. After the war, I lived in the Federation, in Malinjak. We moved from one place to another, anywhere, just to settle down. I have a mother and three brothers who returned too, and now live down in Prohići. My father was killed, and he was found in the first round of identifications."

I asked her how she and Elvis spent their married life.

"In the morning when we get up, we have a cup of coffee, milk the cow, let the sheep out. Elvis goes out to tend to the sheep, and I stay at home. If there is no hay in the stable, I fetch some, and bring it to the cow, and so on. If only there were another family, to make it more normal. Then you can really live."

While we talked to Izudina, Elvis was tending the sheep. We set off to find him, and Izudina called to him, "Elvis, come here... Adnan is here!"

Elvis came, and spoke to us.

"Look, I got married. I have a wife now. It's been five months since I got married. Thank God, it's much better. I used to prepare food for myself. I would do everything alone, or with my brother. It's easier for me now, more normal, you know how it is," he laughed, before continuing,

"It's easier to work and everything. When you come back home you have something to eat and drink straight away. That's the most important thing. Before, when I came home, I would prepare my food, while

doing this or that. I had no time for anything, sometimes I didn't eat the whole day... God willing, it will get better. And it is getting better a bit, I think. That's the most important thing."

Today, 20 years after the Srebrenica genocide, Elvis and Izudina have two sons, Abdulaziz and Faris, and their princess Lejla. Aziz has already started school, and is an excellent pupil. The family has two cows in their stable, sheep in their sheepfold, hens in their yard, some dogs and cats. They grow corn, potatoes, beans, onions, pumpkins, and string beans. They have bees, and many fruit trees.

Two tomcats are particularly important to Faris. One is called Žučo (referring to its yellow colour), and Faris named the other one Nije Žučo (Not Žučo), because it is grey.

After Elvis and Nermis' story was first aired on television, Eniz Bešić contacted me. He is from Kozarac, in Krajina, and survived the concentration camps in Prijedor. He then participated in the defence of BiH, and eventually ended up in Norway.

And from Norway, he returned to his native Kozarac.

Eniz told me that he would like to help the Lemeš brothers, by giving them a tractor as a gift. I found it hard to believe that anyone, after watching one TV show, could decide to help in this way. It was an admirable thing to do, in both financial and human senses.

Eniz met with Elvis and Nermis in Srebrenica, and told them about his motivation for deciding to take this step.

"I was watching Hayat TV, and I saw this guy," he said, pointing at Nermis, "And when I found out that they had no parents, that they had returned alone, it made me wish I could give them a tractor. So I talked it over with my sons and my wife, and they agreed. I made a wish and it came

true. I want to give them this present so that they can work here, cultivate their land, and look after each other as much as they can.”

Elvis and Nermis thanked him.

“We are very grateful to Eniz, and God willing we will stay in touch,” said Elvis.

“Good luck! Be wise! Make good use of it, and be prosperous!” Eniz replied.

That day, Elvis promised that he would use the tractor to help other people too. He has been fulfilling this promise ever since.

Hatidža Mehmedović lost her two sons in the Srebrenica genocide, one 16 years old and the other 17. She also lost her husband, and many other members of her family.

Hatidža lives alone in the Srebrenica settlement of Vidikovac. She is the President of the association, Mothers of Srebrenica.

“To do something like this to one people and yet to live under the same roof and watch... you’re being protected by the masterminds and perpetrators and executors, and all those who participated in it. It’s a very bad and difficult situation... And now they’re supposed to be the protectors of returnees, and protectors of victims...”

I had this conversation with Hatidža in April 2007, when an initiative for the special status of Srebrenica was launched. She continued,

“We want to live a normal life, one to which every person, including us, the victims, is entitled. We do not want to be called Republika Srpska. We do not want the Federation either, because, for the sake of it being called the Federation I live alone. For the sake of it being called Republika Srpska, which is a product of blood and genocide, I



live alone. However, let the court decide; wherever genocide occurred, let everyone claim their rights. And we, the victims who remained, who survived Srebrenica, who were expelled from the protected enclave of Srebrenica, are entitled to seek what belongs to us. And I think this means a special status, a district, for Srebrenica not to be a part of what it was, because Srebrenica does not deserve that.”

More than 240 members of the Mehmedović family were killed in the Srebrenica genocide, people who had the same surname as Hatidža, relatives of her husband and sons.

“A child is your biggest joy and sorrow. I feel sorry for everyone, regardless of where war is waged. But my two children are two open wounds without any cure. Not with the whole world can one fill this gap. One finger of my child is worth more than the whole world. But unfortunately... That’s why you must do everything, everything, negotiate for years, in order to prevent the things that happened from happening again. I still feel sorry for every innocent victim. You know that Srebrenica was a protected enclave. You know that our children were unarmed, that they were inexperienced. My children were underage, and not only mine but hundreds; 1,042 underage children, all of them unarmed.”

In 2007, Hatidža said the following about Srebrenica:

“I believe that there is no more miserable place than Srebrenica... And the whole world preaches about it! They talk about Srebrenica so much, and they feel so sorry for it! There is a part of Srebrenica in the USA and there is a part of Srebrenica in England, there are parts of it everywhere, even in Banja Luka! Everyone works for Srebrenica while building themselves up. But they should leave Srebrenica to its people, and to all those citizens who consider Srebrenica to be their own town, who perceive Srebrenica as their own municipality. Because there will be both life and food in Srebrenica, God willing...”

Avdagina Njiva in the Municipality of Bratunac.

Since a number of people from Bratunac were killed in the Srebrenica genocide, the story of return to this part of Bosnia and Herzegovina is not complete without the Bratunac returnees. In the docile village of Avdagina Njiva, the houses (or at least what is left of them) are scattered throughout the nearby hills. This area was heavily affected during the war. After this part of the Bratunac municipality was occupied in the early spring of 1993, the majority of the population withdrew towards Srebrenica municipality, which was under the control of the ARBiH.

I stopped by this village for the first time in June 2001, on my way to Srebrenica.

I saw some people cleaning the ruins.

I approached a woman who was wearing *dimije*, and greeted her with "*Merhaba*" (Translator's note: from the Turkish "hello").

"*Merhaba, come, bujrum*" (Translator's Note: *bujrum* is a Turkish word, inviting the guest to join whatever the host is doing), Hatidža Imamović returned my greeting. She is a widow: her husband, she says, never came back after the fall of Srebrenica. She has six children, some of whom are already adults, and her two sons are married. She told us that this was her second time in the village since the war. The first time was in 1999. She lived in Mihatovići near Tuzla as a refugee.

She looked at the destroyed houses and stables, and said she would like to come back here as soon as possible.

We then met Osman Imamović, who came to Avdagina Njiva for the first time in late 1997.

It took him another three and a half years to visit for the second time. Osman also told us, without hesitation, that his only wish was to return, and that the majority of his neighbours felt the same way. To begin with, Osman said, it was important to have assistance to rebuild houses.

Osman lost his son in the fall of Srebrenica.

After we talked to Osman, we came across secondary school student Eniz Merdžić.

He spoke shyly to us, pointing out the ruins of his own house, and quietly telling us that he often thought of going abroad. He was a 17-year-old with a serious face, and spoke to us without smiling. He said it was both nice and hard at the same time in Avdagina Njiva, particularly when memories of his father, whom he lost in the Srebrenica genocide, came flooding back.

"It's hard. You can't describe your pain in any way. It's very difficult. Painful," Eniz said, with a deep sigh in his shaky voice, eyes full of tears. Then, almost inaudibly, he added:

"But one has spite..."

When we returned to Avdagina Njiva in 2007, however, the smile could not have been wiped off Eniz's face: his house was rebuilt, he had found a job, got married, had a son...

"Everything happened unexpectedly... We could not have dreamt of this back then when we talked, that this time would come, that it would be like this that we would survive here. It's such a contrast to the situation back then, and all those things that happened to us upon our return... But today it is almost as it was before," Eniz told us, explaining that he had finished school in the meantime, served his military term and decided to come back for good.

“Having come back here, I decided to get married and start a family, because I believed that in doing so, a better time and a better life would begin around here. My wife and I both have jobs, we are registered workers, insured. Time goes on. I work. I have some other agricultural projects to start. I plan to harvest cucumbers, to make cornichons. I have an orchard, and so on... There are many plans,” Eniz finishes his story, without the smile leaving his face.

We found both Hatidža and Osman from the beginning of our story of Avdagina Njiva.

Hatidža told us that she bought six heifers and that she grew raspberries. “And so I struggle with those raspberries and those heifers... and with these two kids who I have with me. And I also struggle with myself... And that’s that. You’ve got to live, you’ve got no choice,” Hatidža said, telling us that one of her sons left for Brčko, “He found a job there, his wife works there. He had to go and live there. We can’t all live off one pension, so he had to leave.”

In Osman’s yard we ate an excellent homemade full-fat cheese, and some warm, sweet bread prepared by his wife, Tima. Osman recalled the reconstruction of his house, and told us how happy he was when the donated construction materials arrived, regardless of the fact that the reconstruction of the house was physically difficult work.

His wife Tima told us about the first days after her return:

“We made a shed to live in. We built it in a day, and we put a stove inside. That evening, I put my dishes on the shelves. I lifted a cloth, and found a snake under it. I told my sister-in-law, ‘I saw a snake on the shelf,’ but she said, ‘No, it’s not, it’s just a mouse, my dear.’ In the morning, I picked up the cloth again, and there was a snake under it again!”

Tima was very satisfied with how people in Tuzla treated her while they were refugees, and she was full of gratitude, particularly for their kind words.

“It was nice for us in Tuzla. Nice. It does Tuzla people credit, and I thank them! Tuzla received us, but I’m never leaving my place again. It’s nice here. I go outside. Wherever I go, it’s mine. I’m not afraid.”

When speaking about the time since their return, Osman was not as optimistic as Eniz. He says that the poor employment rate, particularly for young people, makes their lives pretty difficult.

“As you can see just among us in Glogova, nobody works in Bratunac municipality. Nobody. And if one doesn’t work and has no income, one cannot stay here. One has to go and find work,” Osman said, adding,

“I don’t think it’s fair, of course it’s not fair! It wouldn’t be true to say that it’s the same to live here as it would be in Sarajevo or Tuzla. But it wouldn’t have been good not to return. It would have been even worse! Take the two of us, for example. We could perhaps survive with these 300 marks somewhere else... But what if everyone did that? I decided to go back immediately, as soon as it became possible. At least while I’m still alive to protect my estate, it won’t be sold for peanuts to anybody who tried to kill, expel and displace me.”

## Life afterwards...

The 15<sup>th</sup> anniversary of genocide was an opportunity to settle the accounts — at least in the media — as much as was possible. It was an occasion on which we could try to at least partially respond to the question how life in Srebrenica looked so many years after these crimes were committed.

I visited the people of Srebrenica for who knows how many times in a row, on a snowy day in February 2010.

At a barber's shop in the centre of town I met Ahmed Ustić, a young man known as *Brijač* (Barber), to his fellow citizens.

I sat in the chair as Ahmed took up his scissors. While cutting my hair he told me how he decided to come back to Srebrenica from the Federation of BiH. He lives here with his wife Sanela, a son and a daughter.

"When a man works, and loves his job, and does it in an honest way, you can manage... But I also had a good reputation, because of my father and grandfather. The people here immediately accepted me as their barber, their new-old barber. While I was in the Federation, I had to develop my business for a year, for people to realise that I know how to do this job."

His formula for success was simple: "Hard work, hard work and only hard work, no other way! Before all that, when I decided to return, I had to

think hard about what to do and how to do it. Paddle your own canoe — it's the only way!" said Ahmed, who plays guitar in the Srebrenica rock band Stari Grad (Old Town) in his spare time.

Having had my hair cut, I headed to Šahida Abdurahmanović's house, at Drugo Polje, near Potočari.

Šahida's son and daughter live abroad, and her husband Jakub was killed. She returned to Srebrenica with her mother, who died just a few months after she had returned to her native soil.

"We live the best way we can... We are here, with our sadness and pain. Personally, I would say that the Memorial Centre is our focal point, our link to this area. Second, I always mention spite and defiance... I know that today, with my presence here, I have ruined the plans of those who wanted to destroy us completely, to ethnically cleanse this region and to leave it completely without Bosniaks... Our presence here ruins their plan, and that's something meaningful to me."

Munira Subašić and Zumra Šehomerović, from the Movement of Mothers of Srebrenica and Žepa Enclaves also happened to be at Šahida's house that day.

Munira described how she felt during her visit to the Potočari Memorial Centre:

"When I went to Potočari today, walking among the graves, at one moment I felt that I was with my child... I made my biggest wish: to find my child, to bury him next to his father, uncle, and friends... The only wish of any mother after this genocide is to find the bones of her children, and for those children to have their names inscribed at Potočari."

Munira buried her son Nermin on 11 July 2013.

She told us about the activities of her association. At this point, I will repeat what I wrote before: to thank the Srebrenica mothers that the plan to bury the victims of the Srebrenica genocide in the Federation of BiH was not carried out. Through their persistence, they won the battle for their loved ones to find peace in the place where the genocide began: in Potočari, near Srebrenica.

"It's important," said Munira, "both ethically and substantially, that with the help of good people, the association that I am in charge of has helped returnees to this region of Bosnia and Herzegovina over the years.

"We've helped as much as we could, so that people could have a hoe, a machine, a cow, a chainsaw, some sheep here and there... "

Munira stressed that they have tried to help children who lost one or both parents, and to make their wishes to go to high school and university come true.

Zumra Šehomerović, who lost her husband in July 1995, said, "When you come to Srebrenica, you walk down the street and you come across someone you saw on the 11<sup>th</sup>, 12<sup>th</sup> or 13<sup>th</sup> of July 1995, in Potočari with a gun, or taking away your neighbour, friend or relative, or snatching a child from its mother's embrace... You can't remain indifferent. Sometimes your mind is boggled by constant thinking."

She emphasised how important it is that those killed in Srebrenica are buried in the exact place where many of them saw their loved ones for the very last time.

"I keep saying that the dead have filled the living with courage, so that the living could return to their pre-war homes... I have had the



opportunity to hear mothers who came to visit the graves say, 'Son, I'm going now, but I'll come back...' We will rebuild Srebrenica. It will be beautiful as it used to be."

Imam Damir effendi Peštalić, born in Gradačac, came to Srebrenica in 2004 with his wife Adisa, who was born in Livno. They had two daughters and a son in Srebrenica. Over time, the Srebrenica people have become very fond of him, and he of them. Imam Damir is head of the *Majlis* (local organisational unit) of the Islamic Community in Srebrenica, whose mosques and other Islamic community facilities were completely demolished after the occupation in 1995. Along with his closest associates, he has participated patiently in the revival of religious life here in every way.

Over the years, his openness to developing good relations with the Serbian Orthodox Church has been evident.

He is a passionate soccer fan, often spotted at the stadium of Srebrenica football club *Guber*, one of the fixtures of the town, which is becoming a key factor in the restoration of trust between Bosniaks and Serbs in Srebrenica.

As someone who communicates with dozens of people every day, it is obvious to me that Damir is a rewarding interlocutor, who is familiar with Srebrenica's biggest challenges:

"One cannot escape the impression that the story of return today might not be a finished one, but it is a very difficult story, whose burden has mostly been put on the shoulders of those who have returned. It's been like this since the very beginning. If we analyse the issue a little, we see that the returnees — primarily the mothers, who, irrespective of the genocide and all that they lost because of it, found such strength — carried a huge burden. We must say that the system did not do its job; if

issues are not resolved in a systematic way, it will be difficult to retain the people who have returned here, and it will be particularly difficult to bring back those who have not yet returned.”

The education system is a very important issue for the returnee population of Srebrenica Bosniaks.

“It’s very hard to live with the fact that you have to send your children to a school where they will be taught that what happened here was a patriotic war rather than genocide. It’s hard for me, who did not experience the genocide in Srebrenica, to send my child into that situation. Imagine how difficult it must be for women who lost their husbands, children who lost their parents and everything else that can be lost in this world. Then comes security, economy... How can we live in Srebrenica, how can the young people have perspective?”

On the topic of life in Srebrenica and interpersonal relations, Amra Begić from the Potočari Memorial Centre told me,

“Whether we want to admit it or not, we’re still divided. We need a lot of things, and we need to talk about truth and reconciliation. The only way is to begin and end this conversation here in the Memorial Centre... I am afraid that the truth is already a little bit late, as fifteen years have already passed since the genocide, and we don’t have five lives, to waste one and take another... I hope that somebody will realise that things have to change extremely quickly.”

That year, 2010 was an election year. Pre-election promises over the years have focussed particularly on Srebrenica. A lot has been promised, and a lot has been said about Srebrenica during all the election years.

“Srebrenica is a pitiable thing, used by everyone for the purpose of begging. We can see this in the case of the upcoming elections. I believe that everyone will preach about Srebrenica. And when it’s all over, Srebrenica will be forgotten. Srebrenica will remain what it was before,” said Zumra.

Šahida thinks that nowadays Srebrenica deserves to be the most organised town in Bosnia and Herzegovina. She says,

“The way it is today, a lot of bad things are arranged at Srebrenica’s cost, at the expense of us, ordinary people who deserve to live a better life here.”

Imam Damir sees the future in young people, but under the condition that they are given full support:

“In Srebrenica, we have, thank God, dozens of young people with university degrees, bright girls and boys who can take on the burden of Srebrenica. But without moral support, without people <at the top> who think about the youth of Srebrenica, without any plans, without strategies, without support, we cannot endure. And this is something we have to work on.”

In 2010, Ćamil Duraković, Head of the Municipality, saw loss of interest as a key problem in Srebrenica:

“I think that Srebrenica has been forgotten somewhat, and I think that we deserve at least a little bit more of that moral concern, to perceive that we are not alone or abandoned.”

I have spoken a lot with Ćamil about Srebrenica over the years, mostly about solutions for the many problems linked to this town, and much less about those wartime July days, when he, then 16, managed to

survive and reach freedom, by going “through the woods,” as the path the Srebrenica men tried to reach was known by many.

He promised that some day we would walk that path together, and he would tell me everything.

Ćamil returned to Srebrenica from the United States in 2005, after graduating from university. Rather than making American dream come true, he decided to live the Srebrenica dream, with all the challenges that entailed. He became involved in politics, and now lives with his wife Merdisa and two daughters. He is a returnee in the true sense of the word.

The significance of returnees for the whole of Bosnia and Herzegovina is immeasurable. As Amra Begić asserts, “If there were none of us returnees in Srebrenica, none of us in Višegrad, or none of us in RS, and if there were no Serbs who returned to Sarajevo, no politics would make sense. So I hope that somebody will understand the importance of us being here and do something to make the situation better for us. Because in that way the situation will also be better in Sarajevo and in Banja Luka and everywhere else.”

The lack of understanding of everything the people of Srebrenica have been through is best reflected in Munira’s words:

“They ask us why we don’t return. How can we return? Today, just walking around Srebrenica, I came across four or five war criminals. Those who slaughtered, raped, and killed in Potočari in 1995. Why are these criminals not being held responsible? Why aren’t they brought to justice? Why don’t they answer for their crimes? Who protects them? Which politics? Those in which a cow is Serbian, the forest is Serbian, everything is Serbian! Well, so help me God it is not going to be Serbian!”

Interethnic relations in Srebrenica today, on the eve of the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the genocide, can be defined as decent. When it comes to issues related to basic survival, Srebrenica people share similar problems, and they discuss them.

But there is almost no discussion about what happened in this town in July 1995.

“It’s very difficult to find someone who will speak openly about the truth of Srebrenica. Still, I hope that there will be more and more of them,” Amra says, “I hope that a particular guy, a Serb from Srebrenica, will identify himself in my story, because he asked me not to mention his name. This is a guy who came to the Memorial Centre and cried over what had happened to Bosniaks, and truly genuinely wanted to learn as much as possible about Srebrenica. I hope that there will be more and more of these people among our fellow citizens. Unfortunately, very few Srebrenica Serbs come to the Memorial Centre.”

Valentina Gagić-Lazić, a non-governmental activist, is originally from Šekovići, but currently lives in Bratunac. She spends the majority of most of her days in Srebrenica.

“I don’t know with which degree of closeness we can talk today after everything that happened, but, thank God, we can find some normal human relations. Because of some of the things that happened in the past war, it’s very hard, especially for mothers who lost their children, regardless of their ethnic backgrounds.”

Amra and Valentina have extreme mutual respect, and describe each other as “outspoken, righteous, and down-to-earth”.

“I wish there were more people like her,” Amra says.

Valentina adds “Amra — I associate her with justice.”

I leave them talking amiably in the restaurant of the Srebrenica Department Store.

Without any desire to under- or overestimate relationships of this kind, there have been more and more of them with each passing year.

But some topics are still not being discussed in Srebrenica.

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On 11 July 2010, on the 15<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the genocide, Srebrenica woman Kada Hotić answered the question of what Srebrenica is today:

“Srebrenica was killed on the 11th of July. The life Srebrenica had on that day was killed. Today, I cannot say that Srebrenica does not live. But it is a different life. Some people live with sadness, some live impudently... But we have to remember the 11th of July, when we bring back our sons, husbands, relatives... This is the place where I used to be happy once together with my family. Today I can only remember that as I look for my son in the graves.”

On the evening of the same day, I spoke to two young people with university degrees, who got jobs in the municipal administration. These were Muhamed Avdić, who returned in 2008, and Nermina Muminović, who has been back in Srebrenica since 2006.

Muhamed said that in addition to his love for this town, his decision to return was based on getting this job.

“I must say that it is hard, and challenging, and interesting. A person has to have a big heart in order to be able grasp it all. To cope with the past, and the present, and the future. One has to find a proper measure in life, which will not allow him to violate the past, which will ensure

a normal present leading to a prosperous future,” says Muhamed, and adds, “The problems and interests surrounding Srebrenica are bigger than the place itself. I am afraid that even the smallest move towards the progress that must happen takes place along the line Sarajevo-Banja Luka-the international community-Srebrenica. Some things that can be easily solved are presented as a big deal.”

Nermina pointed out the importance of support to young people:

“Somehow everyone forgets young people who have graduated from university and come back to Srebrenica, but I think that they’re the backbone of this town, and they’re the ones who should lead Srebrenica into the future.”

According to Nermina, numerous challenges lie ahead of the Srebrenica returnees. She pointed out that life in this town is a constant struggle against many obstacles.

“Sometimes, in those moments when this hatred towards us is demonstrated, and when they clearly let us know that we are not welcome in Srebrenica, it can be very hard to hold back. But patience is what keeps you going. I think that, no matter what, we still have to try to struggle, we have to try to attract more young people to stay here, because only with our persistence and knowledge will we manage to safeguard Srebrenica. We must not allow the same thing to happen which our people allowed before, for what happened to be forgotten.”

And what is the state of play on the eve of the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Srebrenica genocide?

In April 2015, I spoke with Ćamil Duraković, Head of the Municipality, about the current situation.

Around 7,000 people currently live in Srebrenica. Bosniaks, according to Ćamil Duraković, make up just over 50 percent of the population. According to the 1991 census, performed a year before war broke out, the population of Srebrenica Municipality was 75.19 percent Bosniak.

In addition to these 7,000 permanent residents of Srebrenica, around 3,000 people live here for part of the year. These are mainly Bosniaks living in the Federation of BiH or abroad, who have reconstructed their houses in the Srebrenica Municipality, and occasionally reside in them. Part of the Srebrenica Serb population lives most of time in neighbouring municipalities in Serbia, but also spends a significant part of the year in Srebrenica.

The reconstruction of houses and apartments is not taking place at a desirable pace. Only around 1,800 housing units have been reconstructed out of a total of 6,500 which were completely demolished. On average, 35,000 Bosnian Marks (€17,500) are spent on the reconstruction of one housing unit, meaning that over 1,600 000 000 Bosnian Marks (€800 000 000) are required to finish the reconstruction.

Recently, only between five and fifteen houses have been reconstructed per year. One of the key reasons for this is the complicated administrative process involved.

One of the larger projects which was successfully completed was the rehabilitation and reconstruction of 98 percent of the electrical grid.

Road infrastructure was not sufficiently developed even before the war, but in the subsequent period Srebrenica received 90 kilometres of newly paved tarmac roads, which used to be country lanes.



With regard to employment, as Municipality Head Duraković pointed out, it is important to overcome the humanitarian perspective of sustainability.

He stressed the significance of the presence of the Prevent Group, referring to it as a socially responsible company, which initially employed 100 people, and then bought the Cimos plant, retaining the same number of jobs there too.

Duraković also emphasised the importance of palettes factory Jadar, clothing manufacturer Alma Ras, a poultry farm, AS Stylea and Klas.

He then mentioned a major investment currently being implemented, which will provide employment for 50 people in the potato processing industry. In addition, as many as 500 families could significantly benefit by selling the potatoes grown on their farms.

The great hopes for the future lie in the metal, wood and food industries, but if problems related to reopening the once-famous spa and recreational complex Guber can be solved, a potential 300 new jobs could be created, according to some estimates.

Ćamil interpreted the current deadlock in the reconstruction and building of the Guber spa as a lack of willingness from high-level politics to make life easier at a local level.

There are 2,300 employed people and 1,600 people registered as unemployed by the municipality's Employment Agency. However, the Head of the Municipality asserts that only around 700 of these have the qualifications and will to work, while others only register in order to ensure their right to health care.

The people of Srebrenica are not unhappy with their primary health care, which is, to a certain extent, at a satisfactory level. However, if they need specialist care they have to look for it elsewhere.

Based on a decision of the Government of the Federation of BiH, returnees can be treated in clinical centres within its territory. The geographical proximity of Tuzla and Sarajevo makes this decision an important one for returnees.

Most births by women from Srebrenica take place in Zvornik, around 50 kilometres away, indicating that, although this town is in Republika Srpska, vicinity prevails in the making of this particular decision.

At this time, more than 60 percent of newborns in Srebrenica are Bosniak. This trend is also present in older children, with the number of Bosniak children at Srebrenica Primary School (which operates a large number of field classes in villages around Srebrenica) rising from 43 percent in the 2006/2007 school year, to 63 percent in 2014/2015, 20 years after the genocide.

The largest number of children attend either this school, which is in the centre of town, or the one in Potočari.

At Srebrenica Primary School, the efforts of parents to improve the position of Bosniak children are visible. According to Duraković, these are not exactly the rights parents and students expect to have, but they are better than in some other parts of Republika Srpska.

From the fifth grade onwards, children are entitled to learn from the national group of subjects. Additionally, in the first four grades of primary school, school transcripts name their mother tongue as Bosnian, and the lessons which might be controversial to Bosniak children are avoided.

In the Potočari Primary School, children are taught from the curriculum of Tuzla Canton, which follows that of the FBiH.

At Srebrenica High School, only 26% of students are Bosniak. However, almost half of the students at this school come from other RS municipalities, or even from Serbia. If this is taken into account, Bosniaks make up more than half of the school's Srebrenica-based population.

With regard to political life, with all its challenges and various obstructions, significant progress can be seen today when compared to the time when police had to guard Bosniak members of the Municipal Assembly. The current coalition is assembled from both Bosniak and Serb electorates.

During our conversation, we recalled an idea from 2007, on the special status of Srebrenica, which emerged after the genocide judgment of the International Court of Justice in the Hague. The idea emerged spontaneously, Duraković said, from the people who had returned, without any instruction. Their desire was to change the newly established standards at different levels of public life, based on the model of a district and under the competences of the state of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

But its implementation did not succeed, primarily due to a lack of support from the international community, and the expected disapproval from Banja Luka.

"The time of mere emotions has passed, though they will always be there. But people want more. And with its geographical position Srebrenica has the prerequisites to become a good place to live. Further strengthening of the economy, and increasing the population — and creating new jobs is the main requirement for that — is the key to revitalisation in any segment, including living together in this area. Politics should not be an obstacle to that," Ćamil Duraković concluded.



A different perspective on  
diplomacy, media, and  
genocide in Srebrenica





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*A scholarly approach to documenting and shedding light on the Srebrenica genocide is extremely important in order to put the truth about the events of July 1995 in an objective context. One of the dimensions of these events, is still insufficiently examined, concerns the role of the media and diplomatic activities in 1995 in relation to Srebrenica. This chapter (which is a reorganised part of my master's thesis, defended at the Political Science Faculty of the Sarajevo University with advisor professor Jelenka Voćkić Avdagić, Ph.D.), uses scholarly methods and arguments to raise certain issues and seeks answers to questions about the relationship between media and diplomacy in the context of the fall of Srebrenica in July 1995 and the genocide that ensued.*

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# Diplomacy and media coverage of Srebrenica: some key questions

The issue of the fall of Srebrenica, or the reasons that led to the occupation of the UN safe area, is multidimensional and so far, especially in terms of the communication science, has not been evaluated in a comprehensive manner.

Therefore, light needs to be shed on the position and role the international community played in the Srebrenica genocide, primarily via diplomatic activities, their implementation, or lack thereof, on one hand, and the multiple positions of the media in diplomatic processes, with their role, conditioned by subjective and objective circumstances, on the other. What, objectively, could the role of the media have been in the coverage of the Srebrenica massacre? In what way was this coverage achieved? Were the media abused in this process? Did the media take a clear stand at the time for the realistic possibility that genocide was taking place before the eyes of the world at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century? If so, which media?

It should be noted that unfortunately, not all circumstances that led to the fall of Srebrenica and to the genocide of the Srebrenica Bosniaks will ever be clarified.

At this point, it seems appropriate to mention the question the members of the French Commission evaluating the role of France in the Srebrenica genocide in 2001 asked themselves: "Will it be possible, one day, to understand Srebrenica?" At the very beginning of their conclusions, the Commission asked this question and gave its answer: "Never fully, as a part of the events cannot be understood by the human mind."<sup>2</sup>

Therefore, it is necessary to assemble the pieces of the puzzle called Srebrenica 1995, through gradual and stratified projects.

The examination presented here covers the period July–October 1995. This timeframe was selected as relevant because it is when most of the executions of Srebrenica boys and men took place. It is also when the first documented information on the genocide committed appeared (with the release of satellite images of mass graves), and it is the time during which media diplomacy was intensified, primarily through drawing attention to the humanitarian catastrophe caused by the concurrent expulsion of Srebrenica women and children, and the genocide committed against boys and men. The last part of this period is relevant because of a stronger commitment from the international community to end the war, first by NATO air strikes on VRS positions, then through the military actions of ARBiH units.

The International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia, with its seat in The Hague, raised an indictment against Radovan Karadžić, former President of Republika Srpska, and Ratko Mladić, former VRS General, for war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide.

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2 [www.bhdani.com/arhiva/204/t20413.shtml](http://www.bhdani.com/arhiva/204/t20413.shtml)

Because of the importance of analysing the Srebrenica genocide, this research aims to put in an objective context information on the omissions and flaws of diplomacy and the media in Srebrenica. Likewise, the inquiry into the Srebrenica genocide and the role of the media in the making of political decisions related to genocide is based on our conviction that the diplomatic and media involvement in Srebrenica in 1995 should be critically examined, as an example of the methods of, and relations between, media and diplomacy in a crisis situation.

# (Non)existent diplomacy on the eve of the 1995 genocide

The key point in the account of diplomatic activities related to Srebrenica in July 1995 concerns the manner in which they were conducted, the ways in which diplomats received information from the ground, and, substantially, the almost non-existent outcomes of diplomacy, especially in the context of genocide prevention.

The starting point should be the fact that the main source of information on the ground was the UNPROFOR Dutch Battalion deployed in Srebrenica, specifically its Commander, Lieutenant Colonel Thomas Karremans. The information he sent from Srebrenica primarily reflected his desire to save his own life and the lives of his soldiers, thus its contents are often contradictory and incomplete.

Air support — which arrived on the afternoon of 11 July and consisted of two planes dropping two bombs on assumed Serb positions — did not have any significant impact on the intention of the Bosnian Serbs to occupy the safe area, and was the only concrete indication of an international reaction to the military developments in Srebrenica on that day.

Although publicly the impression was created that the issue of Srebrenica was resolved in the swiftest possible manner, and that there was simply no room for any action, the truth on the ground was completely different. First, on 11 July Serb forces occupied less than 20 percent of the territory of the UN safe area. The fact that the town of Srebrenica itself was occupied was not necessarily meaningful, because the safe area could have been restored or preserved in the rest of its territory, which would have saved a large number of lives. Furthermore, the reasons members of the UN Dutch Battalion did not allow all refugees to enter the compound are not clear, especially when it is known that even Ratko Mladić, the Commander of Serb forces, was not paying much attention to events in Potočari on the first two days of the occupation. In the sphere of his interest on 11 and a large portion of 12 July was the position and marching route of the defenders of the enclave and some of Srebrenica's male civilians. At that time, in the UNPROFOR compound itself there were only 5,000 refugees, while over 20,000 of them looked for a shelter in the area surrounding the Dutch Battalion's base.

The reasons for limiting the number of refugees inside the compound were beyond cynical: an insufficient number of toilet facilities and inadequacy of hygiene maintenance! Furthermore, the original plan for the deportation of women and children should have implied the full involvement of the UNPROFOR, including transportation by UN vehicles, with a UN escort. An action of this kind would undoubtedly have saved some men and boys.

However, one should be under the illusion that the Serb forces would not have carried out searches of UN vehicles, as the road on which the refugees were deported was more than 60 kilometres long, and led through territory controlled by VRS forces.

None of the abovementioned factors were hardly given any consideration in the reports dispatched from Srebrenica, which came most frequently via Yasushi Akashi, UN envoy for the former Yugoslavia to New York.

It should be noted that after Akashi spoke to Admiral Smith, Commander of NATO's southern flank, the possibility of UN air support to the troops on the ground aimed at halting a Serb attack on the enclave was completely eliminated.

The only concrete diplomatic action took place in the UN Security Council on the afternoon of 12 July, when Resolution 1004 was adopted, demanding that "the Bosnian Serb forces cease their offensive and withdraw from the safe area of Srebrenica immediately". The Security Council also demanded that the UN Secretary-General "restore the status as defined by the Agreement of 18 April 1993 of the safe area of Srebrenica".<sup>3</sup>

The Resolution, however, did not specify either time, or manner for the restoration of the safe area of Srebrenica. Russia and China were explicitly against the use of force, and the representatives of other member states of the Security Council did not suggest any specific steps to implement the Resolution.

It is very important to stress that this document does not mention a single word about the fate of refugees in Potočari, or the fates of the 12-15,000 men and boys who were trying to get across to territory controlled by the legitimate Bosnian government.

With regard to the diplomatic activities of official Sarajevo stakeholders, we learned the following from an interview with Hasan Nuhanović,

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3 [www.nato.int/ifor/un/u950712a.htm](http://www.nato.int/ifor/un/u950712a.htm)

who worked as an interpreter for the UN Dutch Battalion, and who lost his parents and brother in the Srebrenica genocide:

Hasan Nuhanović was present during a telephone conversation between the then President of BiH, Alija Izetbegović, and the then Head of Srebrenica Municipality on the evening of 10 July 1995, in which Izetbegović was briefed about severe Serb attacks on the Srebrenica enclave. In this interview, Nuhanović also speaks of an interesting exchange, between his father Ibro Nuhanović and primary school principal Nesib Mandžić on one side, and BiH Government representatives Hasan Muratović and Haris Silajdžić on the other. This exchange took place via satellite phone on 12 July.

“It was a discouraging, shocking conversation. The only thing I understood from it was that my father and Nesib Mandžić had been told to stay in Srebrenica because the BiH Government had constant contact with UNPROFOR, and that the Security Council had adopted the Resolution ordering the safe area of Srebrenica to be restored. Mladić was already in Srebrenica, Bosniaks were still in Potočari, but Serb forces were nearby. Because they were afraid that the line was tapped, my father and Mandžić did not speak directly. I have never got clear answers about what Muratović and Silajdžić did with the information they got from those two... I don't want to let them off the hook, but when they said that we should go back to Srebrenica, they may have had the Security Council Resolution in mind...”

Hasan Nuhanović explains that diplomacy may have been applied in this way because of a desire at that time to give priority to ongoing peace talks, led by Karl Bildt, which aimed to stabilise the general situation and prepare the region for peace negotiations.<sup>4</sup>

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4 Interview with Hasan Nuhanović, conducted for the purpose of MA thesis research.

Some reporters had daily contact with BiH government representatives, and with representatives of the international community.

“It seems to me that it was they who first established a radio-link with Srebrenica, and enabled us, the reporters, to ‘listen to’ that conversation. I could not assess today to what extent that contact with representatives of local and international diplomacy were useful to me. At that moment any contact with national or international officials seemed to be useful. Now, I think that it was pointless talk, like ‘barking at the stars’. We accused international diplomacy, we were critical, occasionally brutal, but it seems that it was of no use,” says Senka Kurt, a reporter who worked for the daily broadsheet *Oslobođenje* at the time.



# Diplomacy “burdened” by the conflict of different interests

The intention of the forces under Mladić’s command were clear on 11 July 1995, but, this clarity did not encourage representatives of the international diplomacy to undertake any actions to pre-empt genocide.

Particularly vocal in rejecting primarily military actions were the commanders of UN troops deployed in BiH territory. A month before the Srebrenica genocide, one of them, General Bernard Janvier, sought from the UN Security Council that the Blue Helmets be allowed to withdraw from the safe areas of Srebrenica and Žepa, due to the fact that they were lightly armed.

US Ambassador to the UN Madeleine Albright confronted him and sought the bombing of Bosnian Serb positions around the safe area of Srebrenica.<sup>5</sup>

The expectations of the Headquarters of UN troops on the ground followed that line, but neither on 11 July nor in the days that followed did NATO do anything to stop the Serb offensive on Srebrenica, or at least

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5 Power, S. (2002), *A Problem from Hell: America and the Age of Genocide*, Basic Books, New York, p.405

partially annul its results. This decision was also partially justified by intelligence estimates on the ground.

*U.S. intelligence analysts had predicted Srebrenica could not survive, but when the attack began, they underestimated Serb intentions. At the CIA the National Intelligence Daily on July 9, 1995, stated that the Serb offensive against Srebrenica was "most likely to punish the Bosnian government for offensives in Sarajevo." It was also "a means to press a cease-fire." On July 10 the CIA assessment remained the same- the Serbs would not try to take the town because they would not want to deal with its inhabitants.<sup>6</sup>*

The situation in and around Srebrenica on 11 and 12 July already contradicted the assessments of intelligence services. Suggestions to retaliate with use of force were rejected.

*A day after the fall of Srebrenica French president Jacques Chirac, known as "Le Bulldozer," called for the reestablishment of the safe area by force. Bosnian Serb leader Radovan Karadžić scoffed, saying, "There will be no withdrawal. Srebrenica belongs to us." UN and U.S. officials also dismissed the French idea as "unfeasible". French President Chirac kept at it, calling President Clinton on July 13 to say the separation of the sexes reminded him of World War II. "We must do something," Chirac said. "Yes" Clinton agreed. "We must act". But "action" was a relative term. To Chirac it meant using U.S. helicopters to ferry French troops into the enclave to recapture Srebrenica. To Clinton this scheme was harebrained, and no other actions leapt to mind. After hanging up the telephone, Clinton muttered that only NATO bombing seemed to produce results. He turned to the young naval aide who had arranged the phone meeting with Chirac. "What do you think*

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6 *ibid*, p.407

*we should do on Bosnia?” the president asked. “I don’t know Mr. President, the aide stammered.” (...)<sup>7</sup>*

The deportation of women and children from Srebrenica and the humanitarian catastrophe that followed were mentioned in the reports of planners and international diplomacy stakeholders. But hardly anyone dealt with the fate of Srebrenica’s boys and men.

*UN special representative Akashi sent a bland cable to New York on July 14 that described the food stocks and the shelter needs of the women and children arriving in Tuzla and the status of Dutch hostages. Only in the eighth paragraph of the second page did Akashi casually reference the missing Muslim men, stating, “We are beginning to detect a short-fall in [the] number of persons expected to arrive in Tuzla. There is no further information on the status of the approximately 4,000 draft age males.” The United States, which had some five spy satellites operating in space at all times, snapping some 5,000 images per day, did not even concentrate on tracking the fate of the men. Each time a satellite camera clicked, it captured a 100-square-mile chunk of territory. When analysts knew precisely what they were looking for and, better yet, where they were looking, photo images could be invaluable. They could depict foreign troop locations, additional buildings and even mass graves. But competition to secure images was fierce, as the satellites were accounted for every minute of every day. The satellites over Bosnia took pictures from an SMO, or support-to-military-operations, perspective. “We weren’t analyzing these pictures in real time for atrocity,” Assistant Secretary of State for Intelligence*

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<sup>7</sup> *ibid*, p.407

*and Research Toby Gati recalls. We were analyzing whether NATO pilots were vulnerable.”<sup>8</sup>*

Subsequently, some senior US officials expressed a certain amount of remorse about this hesitation from the US administration, with regard to military intervention against the VRS, which could have prevented the Srebrenica genocide.

*(...)Assistant Secretary Holbrooke rejects the claim that what followed in Srebrenica could have surprised senior Clinton administration officials. “We didn’t need specific intelligence to know that something terrible was going on,” Holbrooke says. “In fact, the search for intelligence is often a deliberate excuse to avoid or at least to delay action. We knew what needed to be done. If we’d bombed these fuckers as I had recommended in November and in May, Srebrenica wouldn’t have happened”.<sup>9</sup>*

US Vice President Al Gore was incited to an attempt of concrete diplomatic actions by a question from his daughter, who saw in the newspapers a photograph of a girl the same age as her, who had hanged herself after she had been deported from Srebrenica.

*“My twenty-one-year-old daughter asked about that picture,” Gore said. “What am I supposed to tell her? Why is this happening and we’re not doing anything?” says Al Gore. Although Gore gave every appearance of challenging the president, witnesses say his remarks were in fact less geared to convert Clinton than they were aimed at senior officials in the Pentagon, who remained unconvinced of the utility of using airpower. “My daughter is surprised the world is allowing this to happen,” Gore said, pausing for*

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8 *ibid*, pp.405,408

9 *ibid*, p.410

effect. "I am too". Clinton said the United States would take action and agreed, in Gore's words, that "acquiescence is not an option."<sup>10</sup>

*It became clear to the whole world that their position about an armed action was based on evidence of executions of thousands of Bosniaks from the 'safe area' when onetime Polish prime minister and UN Official Tadeusz Mazowiecki, on 24 July 1995 said that '7,000 of Srebrenica's 40,000 residents seemed to have "disappeared.'*"<sup>11</sup>

Republican Senator Bob Dole played a key role in the US decision to halt the war in BiH, through his readiness to participate in NATO air strikes against Serb positions, the decision to lift the arms embargo against the legitimate Bosnian government, and a willingness for US troops to be the backbone of the force that guaranteed implementation of its military component after the Dayton Peace Agreement after it was signed:

*"Today there are reports of more NATO military planning," Dole said on July 24. "But planning was never the problem. Executing those plans was and still is the problem. This debate has never been about policy options, but about political will". Dole, and not the president, had become America's spokesman about the outrages inflicted by the Serbs. On July 26, 1995, the Senate voted 69-29 to require the United States to stop enforcing the arms embargo. Virtually all the Senate's Republicans (forty-eight senators) and almost half the Senate Democrats (twenty-one senators) voted for the bill. Dole declared after the vote, "This is not just a vote about Bosnia. It's a vote about America. It's a vote about what we stand for. About our humanity and our principles."<sup>12</sup>*

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10 *ibid*, p.413

11 [www.inter-islam.org/Pastevents/bsnaEthnGns.html](http://www.inter-islam.org/Pastevents/bsnaEthnGns.html)

12 [www.accessmylibrary.com/archive/5473.../ju\[y-1995.htm](http://www.accessmylibrary.com/archive/5473.../ju[y-1995.htm)

Forty-eight hours later, on 30 August 1995, allied jets took off from NATO airbases, and embarked on a military intervention against the VRS. Bob Dole won the votes of 28 Republicans to support Bill Clinton. The Senate voted to deploy US troops to Bosnia and Herzegovina with sixty votes for and nine against. In November 1997, accepting the position of the Chair of the Commission for Missing Persons, Bob Dole said, "Some may question and some do question why we're involved in Bosnia in the first place. I think that's a very easy answer: because we happen to be the leader of the world"<sup>13</sup>

Senator Dole's statement best illustrates that world diplomacy only began to deal with the issue of Srebrenica and the whole of BiH (through an institutional search for missing persons) after it fully comprehended the consequences of the Srebrenica genocide, and thus the consequences of wartime events over the entire territory of BiH between 1992 and 1995.

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Two key questions which could explain the lack of a leading position from US diplomacy on the eve and during the perpetration of the Srebrenica genocide are:

What might the US have done?

Why did the US not use available mechanisms to pre-empt genocide in Srebrenica?

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<sup>13</sup> Power, S. (2002), *Op. cit.*, p. 441

Samantha Power offers possible answers to these questions:

*There was much the United States might have done. It might have used the Serb seizure of Srebrenica and the ghastly television images to convince its European allies to rewrite the rules of the road in urgent fashion. It might have threatened to bomb the Serbs around Srebrenica and elsewhere in Bosnia if their troops did not depart the enclave, turn over the male prisoners unharmed, or at the very least stop shelling the Muslims who were in the woods trying to escape. It might have acted pre-emptively, warning the victorious Serbs that they would be met with stiff retaliation if they turned their sights on Žepa, the safe area just south of Srebrenica, which was home to 16,000 vulnerable Muslims. If the United States failed to win support for such an aggressive response, and if the allies refused to support bombing, senior U.S. officials might, at the very least, have made the fate of the Muslim men their chief diplomatic priority. They might have warned Serbian president Slobodan Milošević that economic sanctions would be stiffened and prolonged if the men in Mladić's custody were ill treated. They might have carefully tracked the whereabouts of the prisoners so as to send a signal to Mladić, Krstić, and the other Serb officers that they were being watched. Instead, the United States did none of the above. The U.S. response followed the familiar pattern. Ahead of and during the Serb assault, American policymakers (like Bosnian civilians) again revealed their propensity for wishful thinking. They placed an undue faith in diplomacy and reason and adopted measures better suited to the "last war." But a major difference between Srebrenica and previous genocides in the twentieth century was that the massacres strengthened the lobby for intervention and the understanding, already ripening within the Clinton administration, that the U.S. policy of nonconfrontation had become politically untenable. Thus, in the aftermath of the gravest single act of genocide in the Bosnian war, thanks to America's belated leadership, NATO jets*

*engaged in a three-week bombing campaign against the Bosnian Serbs that contributed mightily to ending the war.*<sup>14</sup>

Accordingly, most of the events described by Power — as well as the abundant intelligence evidence available to decision-makers regarding military intervention which was not presented to the public at the time — prove that diplomacy was at this point still distant from the media, and focussed on intelligence-based closed-door diplomatic actions, and rarely<sup>15</sup> on media coverage.

“It was a bloody, but technologically primitive war. What was happening on Bosnian soil could be seen by CIA officers every day in their Washington offices, but they were not alone. Intelligence officers from all the relevant services were engaged in wiretapping and observation of the movements of troops in BiH. In the end, these images stopped the war. The question remains, however, as to why they did not stop it at its beginning. Even in 1992 everything was duly recorded.”<sup>16</sup>

What was photographed at the time, however, was not published in media until much later, when the world, diplomats included, began to deal with the consequences of the Srebrenica genocide.

It was only at this point that diplomacy started to open up from its closed-door stance. This belated move could not save lives in Srebrenica, but it did, at last, partly contribute to stopping the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

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14 Power, S. (2002), *A Problem from Hell: America and the Age of Genocide*, Basic Books, New York, pp.392-393.

15 Notable exceptions are Al Gore’s daughter, and some pictures of Srebrenica women.

16 Azinović, V., “Nebo nad Bosnom” /The Skies above Bosnia/, *BH Dani*, 27 July 2001.



The fact that in the case of Srebrenica diplomacy was “burdened” by different conflicts is illustrated by a statement from the then European Union Mediator for the Balkans, Karl Bildt. At a meeting of the EU Council of Ministers held on 19 July 1995 in Geneva, Bildt “placed more criticism and blame for the fall of Srebrenica on the offensive actions by the Army of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the HVO (Croatian Defence Council) and stressed that the Bosnian Serbs were genuinely committed to a cessation of hostilities.”<sup>17</sup>

In a letter to Slobodan Milošević sent on 11 July 1995 — the very day on which the fall of Srebrenica would come to be commemorated — Bildt writes,

“Dear Mr. President! When we meet again on Friday there is a risk that we will do so in a completely different situation, one in which it will be much harder to achieve any progress in relation to those issues where, as both of us are convinced, progress should be achieved.”

This shows that diplomatic stakeholders were at least partially aware of the potential scope of killings in Srebrenica in the weeks to follow, but could not manage to find a way to prevent them.

Jelko Kacin, Member of the European Parliament, states in a newspaper interview in January 2010,

“This letter is, foremost, an illustration that Karl Bildt had received some notifications that things might move in an unacceptable, unsustainable and inhumane direction, and that he tried to prevent it in his way but was unable to secure Milošević’s cooperation. It also indicates that at the time, during the Swedish Presidency of the European Union, Bildt believed that all moves were made by Milošević himself. Bildt was not

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17 *Večernji list*, Zagreb, 6 December 2009.

aware that he was not moving one step ahead of events, but was actually behind them.”

It is noteworthy that Karl Bildt visited Tuzla seven days before the fall of Srebrenica, and that he asked local official Sead Avdić about its capacity to accommodate a possible new wave of refugees.

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The remarks of Samantha Power on different spheres of interest within US politics — between the ruling majority and the opposition, diplomatic differences, and clumsiness in diplomatic negotiations with European allies — as well as the conduct of the then EU Mediator of the Balkans, Karl Bildt, substantiate the fact that in the case of Srebrenica diplomacy was conditioned by conflicts of interest for several reasons:

- There was no single internal US position about Srebrenica or a method of response to the genocide which had already started;
- There was no real information about events on the ground, as illustrated by the telephone conversation between the US President at the time, Bill Clinton, and his young naval aide, a member of the Sixth Fleet;
- There was no strategy in relations between the US and its European allies in the case of Srebrenica.
- There was no strategy within the European Union itself — while on one side French President Jacques Chirac asked for military intervention, the EU Mediator for the Balkans had already researched accommodation capacities for future refugees from Srebrenica.

- The fall of Srebrenica was accepted as a *fait accompli* as early as 11 July 1995, as is illustrated by Bildt's letter to Slobodan Milošević.

Most of these insights only became public a few years after genocide was committed. It is this that confirms the presence of closed-door diplomacy in the case of Srebrenica, irrespective of the attempts of diplomatic action described in Samantha Power's book, or Karl Bildt's pragmatic "diplomatic solutions", which were evidently based on information that Srebrenica would fall.

# Media coverage and the Srebrenica genocide

In the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, the media started to live on conflicts rather than discoveries. The conveying of information about and related to Srebrenica in July–October 1995 confirms this assertion.

Nevertheless, media coverage of the Srebrenica genocide in 1995 was focussed on broadcasting developments on the ground, not only in the Bosnian media but also in regional and world media. It is noteworthy that in most cases, local and regional media broadcast news from international agencies and global media, “tailoring” them to their own versions of the Srebrenica truth.<sup>18</sup>

*The media ignores most conflicts most of the time. The coverage of the pre- and post-violence phases is negligible at best and only a few armed conflicts are covered in the violence phase.*<sup>19</sup>

Srebrenica seems to be an exception here. The media did cover the most violent phase, but within a feasible framework.

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18 This is achieved through the use of terms such as, “liberated Srebrenica”.

19 Peter Viggo Jakobsen: “Focus on the CNN Effect Misses the Point: The Real Media Impact on Conflict Management is Invisible and Indirect”, available at: <http://jpr.sagepub.com/content/37/2/131.abstract>

Media coverage of the Srebrenica genocide can primarily be analysed by looking at the content published in print media, which is more accessible than video archives. At the time (due to a media blockade of the Srebrenica region), television stations mostly broadcast agency news. The available video material was strictly selective, as since early 1997, only media from Serb-controlled territory and electronic media from Serbia had access to the Srebrenica region.<sup>20</sup> Television stations from abroad, and those operational in the territory controlled by the legitimate Bosnian government, only had access to coverage in the BiH regions where those expelled from Srebrenica were located. This meant that their reports were based solely on survivor testimonies. These testimonies were inevitably selective, due to a lack of knowledge of the facts about what exactly had happened to those men and boys who had left Srebrenica and moved towards territory controlled by the BiH government. Not even the testimonies of those who managed to reach the free territories could come close to portraying the scope of the crime committed against Bosniak men and boys from Srebrenica.

To explain the chronology of the media-diplomacy relationship in the shortest terms: media interest in the events in and around Srebrenica before the establishment of the so-called UN safe area in the Srebrenica region in April 1993 was mostly kept at the level of broadcasting information from the ground, similar to the way in which information from other parts of Eastern Bosnia was distributed, especially in the first few months of the war. In the first months of 1993, media interest in this part of BiH grew due to the fact that Srebrenica, along with Žepa and Goražde, represented the only area controlled by the legitimate Bosnian

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20 This is a kind of a prototype of the *embedded journalism* that we later witnessed in Iraq and Afghanistan

government. At the same time this area also became interesting to the media because of its large humanitarian catastrophe, reflected in the concentration of a large number of refugees from other parts of Eastern Bosnia — forced from their homes by military actions and a lack of food, power sources and medication — in a relatively small area. Regarding the media impact on the declaration of Srebrenica as a UN safe area: it was (as shown by examples cited in this thesis) rather meagre, but it was still bigger and more visible than its impact on the diplomatic decisions of July 1995.<sup>21</sup>

Diplomatic activities related to Srebrenica in July 1995 were of a closed-door nature, and, at the moment of genocide, almost non-existent. Based on information from the ground dispatched from different centres by commanders of the international peace forces deployed in BiH, from the early to mid-July 1995 diplomacy was absolutely minimal. In the days immediately preceding the fall of Srebrenica, the main source of information for stakeholders of international diplomacy was the Commander of the UNPROFOR Dutch Battalion. The cables sent from Srebrenica to the Dutch Ministry of Defence, and from there to NATO headquarters in Brussels and the UN headquarters in New York contained no information about the killings of people from the Srebrenica enclave. The first information about the murder of the Srebrenica men came via these cables as late as the evening of 13 July.

In addition, the total media blockade of Srebrenica created a gap in coverage on 9, 10, 11, 12 and 13 July, when reporting opportunities were only available to media outlets originating from the part of BiH that was

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21 This conclusion primarily relates to the media reporting from the territory controlled by the ARBiH, and, to a somewhat smaller extent, media active in countries with Western democracies.

occupied at the time, and from neighbouring Serbia. This coverage can only be described as propaganda, aimed at portraying the “liberation” of Srebrenica, and the termination of the “terror” exerted against Serb civilians by “Muslim” forces from the safe area.

In such reports, VRS General Ratko Mladić, indicted for genocide in Srebrenica before the ICTY, was portrayed as an officer abiding by the highest ethical military principles. Video clips depict him distributing chocolate bars and sweets to Bosniak children, who had sought safe haven in the former Battery Factory where the UNPROFOR Dutch Battalion was quartered. He spoke of the evacuation of women and children by bus to the territories of Kladanj, Kalesija and Tuzla municipalities, which were controlled by the ARBiH.

These reports, however, hardly mentioned the fate of the Bosniak men and boys who had sought safety by attempting to break through to the free territories.

Prior to the arrival of the first expelled people, who were women and children, other media did not have access to indirect, let alone direct coverage of the events in Srebrenica on the days mentioned above.

All major local and world media outlets broadcast the first testimonies of expelled people, but they were still left out of the loop regarding diplomatic activities, which started on 13 July, and once again showed the scope of disagreement among key powers and international organisations concerning issues related to the Bosnian war and a method for halting it. Since closed-door diplomacy was still in effect, deep disagreements between key partners did not manage to get through to the public. The media were excluded from the process, and although this might have assisted in the making of diplomatic decisions, these decisions did not go further than a formal request for a ceasefire.

Individual diplomatic initiatives — such as that of then French President Jacques Chirac on the necessity to restore the UN safe area by military means — failed. Diplomacy remained at the level of analysing its own failures, including: misinformation from the ground; the incorrect assumptions of security and intelligence services that Bosnian Serb forces had no intention to capture Srebrenica; and the misguided estimation that there would be no mass executions of the captured Bosniak men and boys. All of the above-listed are characteristic of the diplomacy applied in July 1995.

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In such diplomatic chaos, there was evidently no space for reporters and the media. With regard to media and diplomats, at that time reporters were only in a position to convey the ineffectual viewpoints of the world's statesmen and high officials of key international organisations about the horrific events in and around Srebrenica.

Likewise, the media were engaged in producing a certain sort of commentary in which, apart from the generally-known facts, there was not yet specific substantial evidence about the terrible crimes that took place in Srebrenica. This commentary gave only contours of the scope of the Srebrenica tragedy, and illustrate the correlation of the terms “diplomatic activities” and “coverage”.

In a significant number of the texts and articles published, in particular those written between 11 July 1995 and the end of the same month, writers actually tried to prove that in the case of Srebrenica, especially at the time of the genocide, closed-door diplomacy was in effect.



At the same time, the executions of Srebrenica men and boys started, and the first survivors managed to reach territory controlled by the ARBiH. Their testimonies became the subject of huge media interest, but this still did not lead to any diplomatic activities aimed at deterring Serb forces from committing genocide.

The puzzle of facts starts to fit together: Srebrenica fell; at that moment, the political and military leadership of the Bosnian Serbs, aided by official structures in Belgrade, blatantly violated the resolution that declared Srebrenica a UN safe area and suffered no consequences; the population of Srebrenica was expelled; mass crimes against Srebrenica's male population began.

Even when clear evidence of the above started to appear, diplomacy failed to do anything to save at least some of these men and boys.

The reasons that the world's diplomacy conducted itself in such a way can be seen in the following:

- The continuity of the attitude of global powers towards the Bosnian issue, which was conditioned by the lack of a clear interest to preserve BiH as a unified country, and deep disagreement within the international community itself concerning the modalities of how the war should be stopped and which composition of BiH should be supported;
- A misunderstanding of the real intentions of the Serb leadership in Pale and Belgrade towards the Bosniak population both in Srebrenica itself and throughout BiH;
- A preference for the path of least resistance and an inclination towards pragmatic solutions, irrespective of the price to be paid, which in this case was the lives of almost 9,000 people.

This lack of action by the international community is not necessarily linked to the fact that the victims of the genocide were Bosniaks, but it leaves enough room for conspiracy theorists to speculate that the victims' affiliation with the Muslim tradition is chiefly responsible for the lack of a specific international reaction between April 1992 and September 1995.

However, constant media coverage of the Srebrenica genocide, testimonies of expelled women and children and male survivors, the first clear evidence of the executions, and the first substantial evidence of mass graves would incrementally place Srebrenica in diplomacy's sphere of interest, primarily that of the United States. On 10 August 1995, after the USA made public the first satellite images of the mass graves in Nova Kasaba, a new stage in media-diplomacy relations concerning the Srebrenica genocide began.

Whatever the reasons behind the US administration's decision to offer evidence of the massacre to the public, this act aided the characterisation of the crime committed in Srebrenica as genocide. An article on the scope of the crime which, together with the previously-mentioned satellite images, was published on 18 August 1995, in the daily *Christian Science Monitor*, by American David Rhode, and became a turning point: created as a diplomatic-media product, this article would provoke both media and diplomacy to react.

Accordingly, during the period after the disclosure, via the media, of the first satellite images of mass graves, the opening of diplomacy was initiated, as it began to turn towards open diplomacy. Though the sequence of events from early August to mid-November 1995 (HVO's Operation Storm; liberating operations by the ARBiH; NATO air strikes against VRS positions; the termination of military operations in October 1995; and diplomatic and political preparations for the signing of the

Dayton Peace Accord) frequently distracted the attention of the media and diplomacy from Srebrenica, this period was crucial to the laying of the foundations of what could be called media diplomacy.

When it came to Srebrenica, diplomacy would once again resort to pragmatism in the Dayton Peace Accord.

# Media in the open field: between refutation and recognition

At this point, it is important to mention the approach of the Serbian media, because their attitude towards the Srebrenica genocide has over the years, been a litmus test for the attitude of the Serbian public towards these issues. This has burdened BiH-Serbia relations for many years.

Reporter and media analyst Tamara Skrozza says:

“At that moment a rational consumer of the state-controlled media could come to the following conclusions: there was no crime, terrorists were simply driven out; there were some satellite images, but who knows what has happened to them, and in any case they were faked; Muslims killed each other, and Serbs killed them after being provoked by their assaults; Muslims were killed by Dutch soldiers; and some of the victims were ‘alleged victims’.

“When it became clear that any new theory would be redundant, the counting of Serb bodies began, while everything related to the Muslim victims was put in inverted commas.

“All this suggests the conclusion that people here read the wrong newspapers, that some people did not really want to be informed, and that a few thousand dead bodies is too much to swallow all at once, even for those who are used to consuming everything.”

For a long time — especially at the time that this research concerns — Serbian media, especially those outlets controlled by the state, outright denied the Srebrenica genocide. As time passed, this attitude has changed somewhat, as indicated by Hasan Nuhanović:

“Over the last several years, especially after the footage was broadcast showing the live execution of six Srebrenica boys and young men, committed by members of the Scorpions paramilitary unit from Serbia, things have slowly changed. A part of the Serbian public has started to understand what happened in Srebrenica. I would give them a piece of advice: quote the judgements of the International War Crimes Tribunal related to Srebrenica; you will tell the truth, but at the same time you will protect yourselves (...)”

In this context it is also important to comment on media coverage from RS (Republika Srpska), though outside the timeframe of the research, because of its importance to overall internal relations in BiH, which are often conditioned by the events of Srebrenica.

“Media coverage in Republika Srpska of the crimes committed by the Serbian side in general, i.e. its formations, individuals and decision-makers, has passed through different phases. For years the public here disregarded the crimes committed by members of the Serb community. The first turning point, admittedly a small one, only took place after the footage of the Scorpions was shown. For the first time, the citizens in this entity were faced on their TV screens with something that had been refuted and denied for years, as if had never happened. Or, alternatively,

that had been put in a more relative context, by “justifying” the crime of genocide in light of the crimes committed against Serbs, and in this way it was accepted.<sup>22</sup>

“In the past several years, public contesting and refutation of genocide in Srebrenica has taken place in the political sphere, which has not been without consequences in media coverage, especially by those outlets close to authorities.<sup>23</sup>

“The adoption of the Declaration on Srebrenica in the National Assembly of Serbia rather raised the issue of troubled relations between Belgrade and Banja Luka, then created an opportunity for Serbs in Republika Srpska to define their position on the Srebrenica genocide. This provoked fierce reactions from non-governmental organisations, such as associations of veterans, war victims, missing persons, and camp inmates, which were the focus of media coverage, and which were much louder than those rare voices that requested the determination of a clear position on the Srebrenica genocide. I am afraid that they are very few of these in RS.<sup>24</sup> Even when a request or appeal to face Srebrenica comes from within the institution, as it did in 2004, by then President of Republika Srpska Dragan Čavić, we can see that it ends in the termination of a political career. At the time when he publicly broke the silence and defined a position on Srebrenica, Čavić was not sufficiently supported by social, political, intellectual, or even media elite.”<sup>25</sup>

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22 This is substantiated by an article in *Glas Srpske* of 25 March 2010 with the headline, “Milorad Dodik: Srebrenica cannot be a killing site that is singled out ”

23 As Dodik says in “In Srebrenica, a large-scale crime took place, but it is not genocide”, *Novosti*, 12 July 2010, and “Too much politics in Srebrenica”, *Nezavisne novine*, 4 May 2007.

24 In “Declaration on Srebrenica –an RS perspective: Serbia’s Historical Mistake”, Milorad Dodik expressed his fear that this action would be misinterpreted and misconstrued as evidence of a whole nation’s guilt; Branislav Dukić, Vice-President of the RS Association of Camp-inmates, “Declaration on Srebrenica – The hypocrisy of our brothers across the Drina”, *Glas Srpske*, 1 April 2010.

25 Tanja Topić, in an interview made for the purpose of this MA thesis.

In case of media in RS and Serbia, media attempts to put the genocide in Srebrenica in a more relative context by abusing professional standards are still evident, even in the coverage of war crime trials in the local courts in Serbia.

After analysing a total of 194 articles from the print media in Serbia — *Politika, Blic, Danas, Press, Večernje novosti, Kurir, Vreme, and Evropa* — between November 2005 and April 2007, Helena Zdravković Zonta points to some general tendencies in the methods of the media in their coverage of trials for crimes committed in BiH:<sup>26</sup>

- Trials are not given enough space or attention in the media in Serbia;
- Coverage is not accompanied with a social dialogue on crimes and accountability of the state;
- There is no interest in victims or implications of the events for future generations;
- Coverage is characterised mostly by conveying official statements and giving excessive space to those accused of the worst war crimes to present their defence;
- Reports do not comment much on the criminal activities of the accused, but rather draw public attention to a romanticised version of their wartime pasts, conveying their own statements that deny their guilt and responsibility, and broadcasting extensive interviews about the patriotism and courage of the accused.<sup>27</sup>

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26 Zdravković-Zonta, Helena (2011), *Media, Nationalism and War Crimes: The Scorpion Case*, RRPP Conference Proceedings "Social, Political and Economic Change in the Western Balkans", <http://www.rrpp-westernbalkans.net>

27 *ibid*, p.2.

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The aim of this MA thesis, the excerpts of which, in an abbreviated form, are presented in this chapter, was to find out to what extent the media coverage of Srebrenica had an impact on those who made the relevant political and military decisions on the eve of, during, and after the genocide.

The crucial question is: did the media coverage of the Srebrenica genocide and its consequences in July–October 1995 change from a mere broadcasting of the events (media as rapporteurs) to attempts to affect the outcome of diplomatic activities and negotiations related to Srebrenica (were the media stakeholders, or was this media diplomacy)? Likewise, it is important to answer the questions: did diplomatic activities change from closed-door diplomacy to open diplomacy? And: what impact did the media have on the outcome of diplomatic activities?

Research led to the following conclusions:

- Diplomatic activities related to the genocide in Srebrenica in July 1995 were exclusively confined within closed-door diplomacy, which did not have any impact on the ability of the military to pre-empt the genocide;
- In crisis situations such as the one in Srebrenica in July 1995, the media acted as broadcasters of the events, but media participation in any military or political negotiations related to events on the ground was rendered impossible;
- Only when dealing with the consequences of the genocide in Srebrenica did the media resort to a stronger influence on diplomatic negotiations, i.e. media diplomacy was at work.



- Post-1995 some media outlets, especially those from Serbia and especially those controlled by the state, continued to put the crime in a more relative context. This was particularly reflected in the introduction of “the other side”, i.e. “another or different opinion” which attempted to deny genocide. In this way, the executions were no longer contested, but the number of those killed was questioned, and justifications were found for the crimes committed.<sup>28</sup>

Today, diplomatic and media activities are mostly related to the importance of preserving the culture of memory. However, it should be pointed out that for a significant part of the public in Serbia — whose views are undoubtedly still defined under the influence of the leading Serbian media — putting the crime in a relative context has remained the dominant strategem, along with attempts to stress a “balance” in its scope and classification.

As Zlatko Paković, columnist of Belgrade daily *Danas*, notes, “The issue of the other side is nowadays manipulative, because wrong entities are named as the other side (...) The other side is itself within the topic being discussed, thus when we speak about the Srebrenica genocide, it has to be clear to us that the other side is not the criminals and their advocates, but rather those among the surviving victims and their advocates who, for example forgive the crimes as compared to those who do not want to forgive. Of course, the legal sanction for criminals is undebatable.”<sup>29</sup>

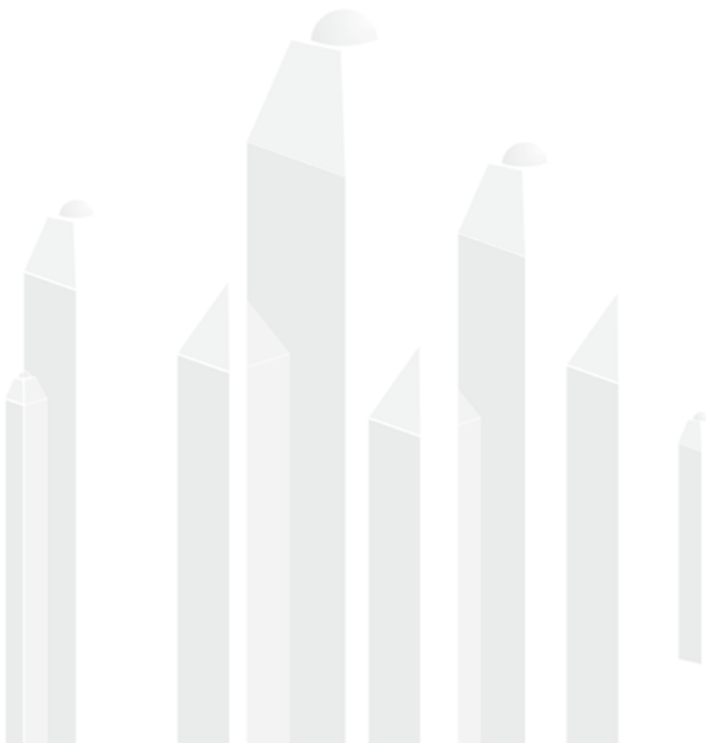
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28 In June 2011 Belgrade TV station B92 broadcast a debate about the declaration on the Srebrenica crime adopted by the National Assembly of Serbia. During the debate representatives of the Serb Radical Party denied that massacre had happened in Potočari at all, and said that the number of those killed in Srebrenica was at least twice as low.

29 *Danas*, 24 June 2011, p.17



# Srebrenica up close and personal





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*Everyone who has ever dealt with Srebrenica in this way or another (either in the media or academically), or has just tried to understand what happened there and why, knows that it is impossible not to develop a special relationship with that region and its people. Srebrenica is more than facts, and more than the interpretation and treatment of facts. Therefore it is impossible to tell a story about it without including personal experiences and one's own impressions. "Srebrenica up close and personal" is a title that anyone who has been there at least once could, and perhaps even must, speak about and make note of. This chapter aims to do just that.*

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## A solitary house

The village of Gladovići is 32 kilometres from Srebrenica, towards the Serbian border.

Gladovići's hamlet of Knezovi, consists of two houses. One locked, and in the other are Elvis and Izudina with their sons, five-year old Aziz and three-year old Faris.

I remember when my friend Abdulah informed me, almost a decade ago, that he had read a story in the newspaper about two boys, brothers Elvis and Nermis.

I bring to mind that, with the help of our colleague Hasan Hadžić, who had written about them, we decided to pay them a visit.

I recall my first arrival in Knezovi, and meeting the boys, who were alone, and had firmly decided to stay on the land inherited from their father.

Their fate had been a harsh one.

Their father had gone missing after the fall of Srebrenica, their mother had gone her own way, and their grandmother, who had been taking care of them, died in early 1996. The two of them had ended up in the Turija children's home, near Lukavac.

They told me back then, when we first met, that they had been treated well in that home.

But although it may sound clichéd, their wish to return had been too strong.

Elvis and Nermis slowly started to build their new home, on the ruins of the old one. I remember Amina's, Abulah's and my visits to Knezovi, and the first television stories about them, as well as some remarkable people who contacted us afterwards, in particular Eniz from Kozarac.

I recall when, six and a half years ago, Elvis, who was twenty at the time, called me to tell me that he was getting married. I asked him, "Who's the bride?"

He responded, "She's nice, her name is Izudina, she's from our part of the country, from Prohići, she's 16..."

He pre-empted my next question, adding, "Her mother knows, she told her that she can marry, and her father isn't there. He set off through the woods, in '95, and didn't arrive, just like my dad..."

In the meantime, Nermis has learned a trade, and is getting by, working now and then.

Elvis has stayed on the farm with his Izudina. Five years ago they had Aziz, and three years ago Faris.

This year, despite the drought, their corn has been a bumper crop. Izudina tells me that they have had a ton and a half of wheat. "I've made both bread and pie from our flour," she adds.

The hay and firewood are ready for winter. Uphill from the house stands a tractor. On the field there are sheep and a cow, and in the yard chickens, five dogs and two cats.



We talk to Izudina's mother, Fata, who has come to visit.

Fata also returned a few years ago, with her three sons.

She tells me about her hard life. She says that never, not for a single day has she gone to school. Though she was born in 1966, she became a grandmother five years ago.

Fata says that she gave up everything so that her children could get an education, and that she encouraged them in it. "They can read and write, thank God, it could have been better, it could. But what can I do... Whatever has been up to me, I have done it."

But she does not hide the satisfaction and motherly pride that the good standing and grades of one of her sons, who goes to Srebrenica High School, gives her.

As I listen to her talking, I think how interesting her speech would be to linguists!

Fata's sentences are an interesting mixture of jekavian and ikavian dialects, rare expressions of Turkish origin, and lexemes specific to the dialects of Eastern Herzegovina and the western part of Sandžak.

This has been a region of mass migration throughout the centuries, which has evidently left significant traces on the language.

Faris is very energetic. He eats chocolate and pie and drinks yogurt, all at the same time.

Izudina says that this mix of foods does not bother him at all.

The three-year old proudly shows me a small jar with coins in it. He collects, as he says, maWks.

Aziz is even-tempered and quiet. He shyly shows me his notebook. He doesn't start school until next year, but he can already read and write.

He looks at the photos of the funeral of his grandpa, after whom he was named. He shows us caskets, the Potočari cemetery, tombstones... He has already been to the Potočari Memorial Centre several times.

Izudina says that Aziz has already begun to understand what death means.

"How could it be otherwise... Death is mentioned a lot here, especially when July comes, and there's always a burial of someone's family member... The child hears it, but he asks nothing."

One day he will ask questions, and seek answers about the Srebrenica genocide. And he will be entitled to them. He will have the right to know what happened to his grandfathers.

We go back to Srebrenica late in the afternoon, to Auntie Hajra's and our Amra Begić's place.

I watch her five-year old Ilvana and nine-month Kerim. Like Aziz and Faris, one day they will also ask about their grandpas.

And they will have the right to know who killed them, and when and why.

Not in order to generalise, and not for the sake of being held captive in the past, but precisely for the sake of the future.

That long night, in Srebrenica, we talk about everything. Auntie Hajra tells us about the past of this town, about its wartime days, and about her decision to come back.

Again risking cliché, I drift off into sleep with true admiration for those who, regardless of the obstructions, and the indifference of decision-makers, have been brave enough, nostalgic enough and committed enough to continue their lives, or at least what remained of them, in the very same place from which they were torn in July 1995.

# Munira

Though I remember many less-substantial facts about Munira, I do not recall when we met the first time.

Which is good, because this way I feel as if we have known each other for ages.

Munira played a key role in my understanding of Srebrenica.

She is an ordinary Bosnian woman, who before the war lived a nice, decent life with her husband Hilmija and her sons Vahidin and Nermin.

Hilmija and Nermin — or Nerko, as he was known — did not get across.

I have heard these words “did not get across” many thousands of times. What they actually mean is “did not survive, did not manage to reach the free territory”.

Like the many thousands of other women who lost their sons, brothers, fathers, husbands, nephews, cousins and other relatives, Munira waited for years, watching the men arrive in caskets.

And while she waited, she spoke about Srebrenica in the best way that she knew how, about the crime of genocide, and the mass graves, together with the other dear members of the Movement of Mothers of Srebrenica and Žepa Enclaves.

And, more than that, she worked.

Munira is an enormously energetic and strong woman.

Although the tears are always there in her eyes, I have only once seen them on her face.

That was in the Cultural Centre in the village of Pilica near Zvornik, one of the execution sites of the Srebrenica Bosniaks.

That day many, many tears ran down Munira's face as she stood alone in a corner.

A cameraman was about to film her, so she quickly wiped them away.

She told me later, "I don't like my tears to be seen. Neither for the sake of enemies, nor for the sake of friends, so that the former cannot celebrate, and the latter won't be sad."

She has done, and continues to do, a lot for returnees, and for the education of the children of those killed in Srebrenica.

In her pursuit of the missing, she has testified at war crimes trials, learning much along the way.

This is something that would be envied by even the most experienced and best-educated diplomats.

She has experienced threats, and suffered insults from people on both sides.

Not everybody should, or has to, like Munira, neither personally nor for the work she has done and is doing.

She does not need to be dear or likeable to everybody. Her work is, of course, subject to analysis, and criticism, as well as praise.

But the rumours deeply affect me; those about Munira's alleged wealth, the alleged profit she has made from Srebrenica.

Some people shamefully abused her openness.

Her ability to organise her life, after all that happened, along with her son Vahidin, his wife and their three children, evidently bothers some people, as does her house in a suburb in the Sarajevo hills.

Some have taken it upon themselves to dictate to the people of Srebrenica where they can have houses, how big those houses can be, how much money they and other members of their household can earn, or have access to.

I have often discussed — with people who, I am afraid did not want to understand — the fact that the association led by Munira is active in Sarajevo, as well as Srebrenica.

“What are they doing here? Why don't they go back and say whatever they want to say from Srebrenica?”

I do not know if I have succeeded in convincing them, but my key argument was that a few members could do much, much more in and from Sarajevo, the country's capital, where state institutions, embassies, non-governmental organisations and the media are located. Their voices could be heard much louder here.

Together with the voices from Srebrenica, they did great things.

It is thanks to them that the Potočari Memorial Centre was built.

The Bosnian government at the time was planning to create a cemetery for those killed in Srebrenica near Kladanj, in the territory of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

The perseverance of these Srebrenica women, and their arguments before both the national government and the international community, led to the decision that the cemetery should be located in Potočari near Srebrenica, in the location where the killing of Srebrenica's men had begun.

These women, the Srebrenica mothers, knew well that if their murdered men did not return, there would be no return for the living either.

I have particular memories of Munira on the eves of the burials, the evenings just before 11 July.

Many of us would sit together until long into the night, at the home of our great hostess Šahida Abdurahmanović, in Dugo Polje near Potočari.

Munira, Amina, Sabina, Mustafa, Florence, Dženana, Alma, Tahira, Kada, Zumra and Sabra would all be there...

Kada Hotić spoke in verse-like sentences, especially when speaking about her late son, Samir. She could hold our attention endlessly with her words.

Once, in early summer, we were in Žepa together. On our way back we stopped in Podžeplje, where we were greatly hosted by our great hosts Fatima and Rešid Jusupović. One of their sons was killed in the Srebrenica genocide, while the other, eight months after the fall of Žepa, suddenly appeared, returning from captivity in the Šljivovica Camp in Serbia.

At one point, Kada took her cup of coffee, and moved from where we were sitting. She sat in front of a barn, and in a low, beautiful voice she sang:

“Tri livade, tri livade, nigdje hlada nema...”

/“Three meadows, three meadows but no shade...”/

Zumra Šehomerović, was there, with her kind voice. She didn't talk much, but one had nothing much to add to what she said...

Reserved, quiet Sabaheta was there too, always lost in her thoughts, in which are the late Rijad. Sabaheta has fought against many challenges in her life, and had just won a difficult battle for her health.

The cheerful and energetic Sabra Kolenović, our Ćabi, also joined in our mixture of tears and laughter that night.

From a safe distance, theorists might say that on the eve of a mass burial such as this, laughter is an impermissible thing...

But actually, at these moments laughter is a good and very important thing. It is provoked by memories of those who are no longer living, stories from the time they were still alive. Episodes from their childhoods are retold, or the way they told jokes. Their favourite dishes. Celebrations of their anniversaries and Eids.

Then, after the laughter came the tears. Silence filled the room. And then laughter again. Then tears.

Tears, the like of which I saw on Munira's face only once, on 12 July 2010, though she spends time with them every day, when nobody is watching.

And yes — I call her “Commander”.



# Maslenica

Ćamil is waiting for us in the centre of Srebrenica, so we can go together to Gladovići, to see Elvis and Izudina. When we arrive, Izudina is alone in their solitary house. Elvis is watching over their sheep in Sulice, a village several kilometres away.

My phone rings. It's Hatidža, asking when we will finish. She's going to make *maslenica* (Translator's note: a Bosnian specialty, baked with layers of pastry and butter) from wholegrain flour. She wants to check when we will come to her place in Vidikovac, a nice settlement on the outskirts of Srebrenica. She doesn't want the maslenica to get cold.

We talk to Elvis and Izudina, both for the sake of the report and for our own sakes.

Hatidža now calls Ćamil, and says, "Come before it gets cold, it would be a shame if you didn't eat it while it's still warm."

We set off for Vidikovac.

Hatidža is waiting for us in the yard of the house where she lives alone. She shows us pine trees planted by one of her sons. She had two sons, and lost them both.

“His name is written there, in front of the door: ‘Almir’, and then ‘Lalo’. This is very important to me,” says Hatidža in a low voice, and goes on to tell us that she lived in somebody else’s yard and somebody else’s house for seven and a half years.

“All houses are nice, all yards are nice — but there’s no nicer house or nicer yard, or even a nicer road than the one that leads to your home,” she says, adding, “But even in this house, when I go to bed, and when I get up... I go to bed with sadness and I wake up with sadness. Because it’s hard. You know that a child is the biggest joy in the world, and the biggest sadness and sorrow in the world. And my children are no more, and our children are no more. Thousands and thousands of Podrinje children are no more, just because they had certain names. But it wasn’t their fault that they had those names. Children don’t choose their names, or their parents, or the place where they’re born.”

She shows me a marble that belonged to her sons, and their school exercise books, which have miraculously remained intact.

“I never believed I could live this life as I live it now. But I do. And now, instead of expecting my children to come home from work, expecting my grandchildren to sit in my lap, expecting to have daughters-in-law, expecting wedding guests, now we have the eleventh day that we live for,” says Hatidža, as she puts the *maslenica* on a tablecloth as white as snow.

“Eat it children, before it gets cold.”

## At the Fazlić's and the Begić's

Auntie Hajra Fazlić is Amra's mom, and Lejla's and Raza's, too.

She is always smiling, and always in the mood for guests.

Auntie Hajra lives in Srebrenica with her daughter Amra, and her little grandchildren Ilvana and Kerim. Her son-in-law Edin "Eca" Begić is always between Tuzla and Srebrenica, because of his work.

Her daughter Lejla lives in Tuzla, and Raza is in Sweden. I have only met Raza once, but I liked her, because her name is the same as my mother's.

Auntie Hajra's husband Rešid was killed in the Srebrenica genocide. She mentions him gladly, and with great love and respect, every time we meet.

I like to introduce my colleagues and friends to my Srebrenica friends, including Auntie Hajra. In no time we invade her house: Vlado, Tanja, Miran, Almir, Husein and I. Supreme medical expert doctor Amela Begić joins us too. She is from Srebrenica, but lives in Sarajevo.

The house is packed, and Auntie Hajra is smiling.

She talks to us for a long time, and in an interesting manner, about Srebrenica and how it was before.

About war.

About the challenges of return.

Slowly and calmly, she even speaks about the biggest tragedies, and about the goodness of people at the most difficult times. Others have told me about her goodness during the war.

During the month of Ramadan I stayed at Auntie Hajra's for *sahur*, the meal at dawn just before fasting starts.

After *sahur* I slowly set off towards Husein Alić's house, where I usually stay when in Srebrenica. I was stopped by a police officer. It was 2:30 in the morning.

He was unkind, and asked me all kinds of questions. I tried to explain that it was not forbidden to walk in the streets of Srebrenica at any time of the day or night. He kept me for a good fifteen minutes, and seemed to have the biggest problem with the colour of my shoes. He noted my physical description in shaky handwriting.

I even believe that he mixed Cyrillic and Latin scripts, though I could not swear to this, as it was dark.

As I continued down the street towards Čaršijska mosque (in the centre of town) I came across Ahmed the barber, to whom I recounted the conversation I had just had. Ahmed said, "There you are, that's Srebrenica, too."

When I told Auntie Hajra the following day about the episode with the police officer, she turned to Amra and said to her, "Didn't I tell you that you should have given him a lift, so that he wouldn't have to walk around in the dead of night?"

Then she said to me, "Please, don't walk around alone at that time of night!"

There you are, that's Auntie Hajra.

# Snow

It is late autumn. My colleague, cameraman Jasmin Omerspahić, and I are driving to Srebrenica. The rain does not stop all the way there. and the smell of snow is in the air.

We arrive at our hostess Šahida Abdurahmanović's place, in Dugo Polje. She lives alone in the house of her late brother, who went missing in the Srebrenica genocide. Her son and daughter live in France. She has three sisters: Ramiza, who returned to Bratunac with her family; Bida, who lives in Potočari and who lost her husband in July 1995; and Tahira, who lost her husband and her underage son, and now lives with her daughter Šahza, a successful university student, in America.

Munira and Zumra are at Šahida's. Imam Damir and his wife Adisa also come with their daughters, Amina and Merjem. We sit until late into the night. It is cold. Still, the room where I sleep is warm, a fire crackles in the stove, and in front of me are large windows.

It starts snowing.

I cannot fall asleep. I think about the goodness of the people with whom I have spent the evening, and about the evil of those who irreversibly changed their lives.

For the hundredth time, I ask myself the same question... I struggle as I write this now, just as I struggled back then, to ask it clearly and without reservation. My fingers linger, writing and erasing, much as my brain "stammered" that night, while trying to put a single word in the foreground:

Why?

There are many answers. Or perhaps there are just a few. Or actually, none at all...

That night, I finally fall asleep, and in the morning I look through the window: the snow is deep and immense.

It is a surreal image: the car we travelled in from Sarajevo is completely piled up with snow. And these great women, with shovels in their hands, are cleaning our car, and clearing the narrow drive that we have to use to get out... and I am still standing at the window, watching.

I see an old woman from Šahida's neighbourhood, with her *dimije* rolled up, clearing the snow from the drive, so that our car can pass.

Everything becomes a blur. I go down to that very old woman, wanting to take the shovel from her hands, and to continue clearing the snow. She gives me a mild smile and says, "Don't worry, let me do it a bit longer... This is the drive my sons once used."

My eyes are full of tears, now as they were back then, but I am also infuriated. Still the question remains: Why? And there is no answer. Or maybe there is? Maybe there are too many answers.

# Thin, white crochet-trimmed headscarves

It is 9 July 2014, just after 10:00 p.m. in Potočari.

This is the time of the *taraweeh* prayer, a special night-time prayer performed during Ramadan, the month of fasting.

Just down from the *musallah* (a place for praying), next to the graves at Potočari Srebrenica men and women start to gather.

A few older men sit on a stone bench. One of them, with a beret on his head, puffs heavy circles of tobacco smoke. He lists the last names of the Srebrenica people, and the first names of those who are no longer there.

The others listen to him, until he stops his talking. Then there is silence, palpable under the clear Srebrenica sky.

Three older women come to the praying area, their faces framed by thin white headscarves trimmed with hand-made crochet in cheerful colours. Crochet is a special type of needlework, requiring a lot of patience.

It also requires time, of which they have had a lot during the 20 years since the fall of Srebrenica.



Countless sleepless nights have been poured into this crochet, nights filled with sadness and hope, and later, nights when hopes had faded that sons, husbands, brothers, nephews, cousins, or other relatives would come.

And for all those who, when they did come, came in caskets with green shrouds.

The elderly women walk slowly, yet proudly. Their *dimije*, made from floral patterned calico, take me back to my childhood. They remind me of the lap of my late grandma, of her *dimije* and the flowers on them that I tried to pick as a little boy.

It seems to me that my memory begins with those moments, from my grandma's *dimije* and her wrinkled but beautiful face, framed by a white headscarf.

I remember her words: "A man, a human being, is harder than a rock... Imagine what I have been through in my lifetime. Life is just a water-wheel that hasn't ground me down yet."

She suffered huge losses in her life, including the experience of losing a child, and she always prayed to God to spare everyone else such a fate.

Yet these three elderly Srebrenica women were not spared. Their faces, full of wrinkles, but so beautiful and bright, tell their stories. These are stories about life and death, foes and friends, fears and hopes, the news that they have received, and that for which they wait, from a drop of blood taken from them (for DNA analysis).

Stories of betrayal, deceit, disappointment...

My thoughts are interrupted when I see in front of me a group of boys and girls, probably born after the fall of Srebrenica.

Although it is an oft-repeated phrase, this region and this town does have its future.

It is in these children, whose lives here, at the edge of Bosnia, will not lack hardship.

The *saffs* (rows formed for prayer), in front of the *musallah* are slowly being filled, as Srebrenica moves towards another 11 July.

It brings with it the eternal question: will we see the next 11 July in this world?

# They are not from here, but it is as if they were

I am afraid that I have made a mistake in writing this story, as I cannot list all the names I should.

For this, I immediately seek forgiveness.

However, there are some names that I must write. These are names that are associated with Srebrenica, even though those who bear them are not from there, but from many regions of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the world.

Many of them are my colleagues: reporters, cameraman, technicians, sound engineers, and editors. Throughout the years, I have developed a special relationship with them due to the unbreakable bond of Srebrenica.

Whatever I write about Amina Gvozden will not be enough. We “broke the ice” together in the Srebrenica region, making dozens of television stories together, and we were in Srebrenica together, both for work and for our own sakes, dozens of times. We made common friends together.

Stout-hearted Miran Mahmutović, with whom there is no “It can’t be done”, “we’ll see” or “I don’t know”. With Miran, especially when it comes

to Srebrenica, everything can be done. There is no technical hurdle that can block his way.

The same goes for Kenan Ćerimagić. We have produced hundreds of hours of program from Srebrenica together, always with the same zeal.

I will stop here with the names of people from Hayat TV and Al Jazeera, because it would be a too big a sin to leave out a single person—and there are hundreds of them.

And all of them, over the years have been like family. And when somebody is like family, they will not hold things against you.

Where people from my profession are concerned, I have to mention three more names:

One is the Production Manager at Federation TV, Hajrija Branković. Unfortunately we only see each other once a year, in Potočari, but somehow when I see Hajrija, when we look at each other, even though we do not work for the same TV station, I know that everything will go well.

Almasa Hadžić, a *Dnevni Avaz* reporter from Tuzla, is one of those people whom you feel as if you see every day, though it is actually once a year; you can simply pick up where you left off.

And, I admit, there is a fourth person: dear Irena Antić, a reporter with FBiH Radio. Silent, inaudible, “invisible” all these years, she has reported tirelessly from Srebrenica.

I have already mentioned Mirsad Bajrović from the Organizational Committee to Mark the Genocide against Srebrenica Bosniaks, but I must do so once again. As with Miran, there are no hurdles for Mirso; everything can be done!

Stout-hearted Rahman Alić from SIPA (State Protection and Investigation Agency), is another of those people whom you just have to see to feel safe; his presence means that everything will go well. Rahman's work always goes well.

# Rain

April is near its end, in the year 2015. It is afternoon, and streams of rain are pouring down the Srebrenica's Crvena Rijeka. A long, hard week is behind me, and now it is Saturday.

I have come to this town and this region often in the last fifteen years. I slept long and soundly last night.

My hosts are young people, Mersudin, or "Učo" (Teacher), a nickname he got when he used to teach, and his wife Isma, born in Gračanica. They invite me into another room for a cup of coffee. I gladly accept the invitation, and leave the room in which I have spent many Srebrenica nights.

We talk, about this and that. Mersudin shows me photos taken at the Perućac lake, depicting exquisite things: beautiful landscapes, a monument to the dead, as a warning and a testament, a fountain, many faces...

The two of them, cheerful, smiling, and in good spirits, with their son Edah and their daughter Merjem, are dear and welcome company.

They are optimistic, and are putting all their efforts into making their lives in Srebrenica as good as possible. And they are succeeding.

We could talk for hours, but I get up and tell them that it is time to start writing...

I go back to the room where I have spent so much of my time in Srebrenica.

It is still raining.

Slowly, I start bringing this book to an end.

This is a book about my most important mission, which is the hardest and the dearest at the same time.

The last lines of this book on Srebrenica are written right here.

In Srebrenica





## To conclude

I try to find special, “big” words for my conclusion. It does not work.

I leave the house, wanting Srebrenica’s famous Guber waters to inspire me. To move me, to chase great thoughts out of me. To conclude.

I am getting soaked. And it really does not work.

Then, all of a sudden, I realise that there is no end.

And there should not be one.

Because Srebrenica is the beginning.



## Epilogue

To participate in the preparation and read the typescript of *Living the the Life of Srebrenica* before it was sent to press was an exceptional honour. To write anything after the lines of Adnan Rondić is a huge obligation and responsibility towards all of you who read this book.

The idea that the emergence of this particular testimony of the Srebrenica truth was necessary was born at the moment when our visits to this region ceased to be purely professional. Perhaps they had never been so; every visit has primarily had a human and humane character. During preparation for filming and afterwards, in informal conversations, events behind the camera, in all possible ways, we tried to reach the most delicate threads of souls and hearts, and of the feelings, hopes and fears of those who are from Srebrenica, and those who feel as though they are.

While I was watching, for what could have been the hundredth time, the television programs which Adnan has made over the last fifteen years, the tiniest details of the filming process passed before my eyes: writing texts on the road, on our knees, on the way back to Sarajevo, on any piece of paper... And all this was done so that the accumulated emotions and observations were recorded and conveyed to the audience in the most authentic manner. We listened to personal experiences of genocide survival, the road to salvation, and life after returning until late into the night, providing people with a feeling of relief in their souls,

and trying to understand their pain — but also their immense strength — the best we could. If only the walls could talk...

Life cannot be conveyed to paper; every human being is a novel of his or her own. Wanting the book to emit real life, all the stories penned by Adnan Rondić are conveyed in the way they were told, by the participants in Srebrenica events. The goal has always been the same: to show that life is being lived in Srebrenica, despite everything!

Therefore, it is my wish, and most certainly the author's as well, that *Living the Life of Srebrenica* should be a guide for future generations, helping them strive to achieve the virtue of good deeds, to understand Srebrenica the best they can, and to get to know its people.

Amina Gvozdin

## List of Abbreviations

<b>ARBiH</b>	Army of the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina
<b>BiH</b>	Bosnia and Herzegovina
<b>FBiH</b>	Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina
<b>HVO</b>	Croatian Defence Council
<b>ICTY</b>	International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia
<b>JNA</b>	Yugoslav National Army
<b>NATO</b>	North American Treaty Organization
<b>NGO</b>	Non-Governmental Organisation
<b>RS</b>	Republika Srpska
<b>SIPA</b>	State Investigation and Protection Agency
<b>UN</b>	United Nations
<b>UNPROFOR</b>	United Nations Protection Force
<b>UNSC</b>	United Nations Security Council
<b>VRS</b>	Army of Republika Srpska

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## About the author

Television journalist Adnan Rondić was born in 1971.

He obtained a BA. in communication studies, and then an M.A. in political studies at the Faculty of Political Science in Sarajevo, where he has been part of the interdisciplinary doctoral studies programme since 2012.

He has worked as a journalist since 1992, when he started his career at Hayat TV. He subsequently worked as a correspondent for the Voice of America from Bosnia and Herzegovina, before joining Al Jazeera Balkans in 2011.

He has also worked concurrently as a media coach for more than ten years.

Adnan Rondić is the author of the study *Povratak između privida i stvarnosti /Return between semblance and reality/*, published by the Friedrich Ebert Foundation in 2007, and a media industry handbook *Medijski nastup(ati): Smjernice za rad s medijima /Media appear(ance): Guidelines for working with the media/*, also published by the Friedrich Ebert Foundation, in 2014.





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*Adnan Rondić*