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A Tour to a Site of Genocide: Mothers, Bones and Borders

By Olivera Simic¹

Abstract

In this personal narrative I aim to describe internal struggles I endure for one day in Srebrenica on my visit to a mass exhumation site. The narrative discusses and raises a series of questions related to human motivations, actions and disturbing traumatic experiences. In an attempt to bring attention and value to our personal experiences, my essay is a critical reflection on some common concerns facing all post conflict societies; that is, making sense of the past horrors and the ways we pay tribute to them. This essay intends to talk about the things and feelings often left unspoken, and, although quite specific in its focus on Srebrenica, contains universal themes that cross countries and continents. Written only a few days after my visit to the site of genocide, the narrative brings with it many humbling and vivid details that are imprinted on my memory. Although I am excited at the prospect of sharing my memories with the world, at the same time I am reluctant to give a revisionist account of this day as I am aware of ethical dilemmas whenever one tries to challenge values and aims of the post genocide tours. The narratives of women from Bosnia and Herzegovina are making an important contribution to history and warn future generations to learn lessons from the past atrocities. This is my contribution to it.

Keywords: Post Genocide, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Feminist Scholar, Insider

Positioning myself²

As someone who was born and grew up in Bosnia and Herzegovina, I witnessed my country falling apart and watched unspeakable atrocities unfold. Not only did I become aware of what human beings are capable of doing to each other, but the pain I have experienced through the loss of my country, my friends and neighbours has marked my life and has made me committed to understanding why people act in disastrous ways, and what the causes and consequences of this behaviour are.

Having this personal background and being a young feminist scholar and a human rights lawyer, I find myself in the unique situation where, on one hand, I am a woman who experienced the pain and tragedy of war and, on the other hand, I am someone who is expected to be an 'impartial, objective scholar'. This position produces a number of internal struggles for me when I am working on issues of human rights, violence and conflict. To be an 'objective scholar' who is expected to have distance from the events to be researched, I find an extremely difficult goal to achieve. These two

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² I would like to thank Joan Nestle for her valuable and helpful comments on an earlier draft of this essay.

different roles of being an 'outsider' distanced from the research subject as a scholar while at the same time a woman and an 'insider' of the atrocities that I am examining creates an ongoing internal conflict for me. The challenges and contradictions created by these two roles are parts of my personal and professional life that I am trying to balance all the time. However, sometimes it is hard to achieve a balance and one of the sides prevails.

This is the story of an experience where my struggles were challenged from one moment to another for one whole day. At the end of it, my personal, 'insider' story prevailed and became shaped in the essay you have in front of you. While aware of feminist, ethics and other theories that could be easily applied to 'back up' my story, I purposively avoided adding any theoretical framework to it. This essay is a personal account and voice of a woman who, similarly to her female compatriots is too often denied spaces and forums to speak up. Women's lives and experiences in public spaces have been absent or made invisible for a long time, and, bringing women's concerns, situations and experiences makes feminist research and writing important as to correct both "the invisibility and distortion of female experience".³ Thus, since feminist theory is informed by the real life stories of women, I believe that my personal experience is an important feminist intervention and contribution to a field of feminist theorizing. Finally, I left this story without a written conclusion as I would like each of you to conclude this story with your own thoughts about who we are and the best ways we can honour our collective selves so that we can walk down a truly humane path.

Introduction

As a part of their agenda, the last two international gatherings in Sarajevo, Bosnia featured an excursion to Potocari/Srebrenica, a site of the 1995 genocide. Included was a visit to the most recently discovered mass grave, which was in the process of exhumation. What are the intentions behind these organized visits? What is their purpose? Is it really necessary for historians and lawyers to 'peer' into mass graves and see remains of mutilated body parts? To what end can such experiences be useful for their work? I have started to ask these questions after being there myself as well...I am not sure if I have found answers yet.

My Journey

July 11, 2007, marked 12 years since the massacre in the eastern part of Bosnia that ultimately led to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) air strikes and ended three and a half years of bloodshed in this country. The Srebrenica genocide was one of the biggest massacres that Europe has seen since World War II. The women and children who survived it became witnesses and survivors whose testimonies and courage to find out, face and disseminate the truth gave them hero status in Bosnia and around the world. Every year on July 11, politicians and key players from the international as well local community come to Potocari to pay tribute to all of the victims identified so far and

³ Lather, P.(1988). Feminist perspectives on empowering research methodologies. *Women's Studies International Forum*, 11(6), 569-581, 571.

those still missing. Each anniversary of the genocide attracts more and more people from around the world who want to come and share their compassion and maybe even ‘guilt’ for not doing more to prevent this horrible event.

The Dutch government in particular felt obliged to act in Srebrenica since a battalion of Dutch peacekeepers were in charge of the United Nations (UN) ‘safe area’⁴ where Muslim refugees and displaced persons from all over Bosnia tried to reach shelter. While the international community looked on, and Dutch peacekeepers witnessed, Serb forces separated men from women, hunting them down in the forests and eventually killing thousands of men. As a direct consequence of media and international pressure in 2002, the Dutch government of the day resigned, accepting their share of blame for allowing genocide in Srebrenica. Shocking to the world and people of Bosnia itself, the genocide in Srebrenica became the stamp that has marked the country of Bosnia but also the Netherlands, perhaps forever. It seems that the link between these two countries in recent years became more visible as evidenced by both countries establishing memorial centers dedicated to the genocide in Srebrenica.

Representatives of a non-governmental organization, Mothers of Srebrenica, as well as officials in Bosnia seldom miss the chance to mention the Dutch battalion as the one to be blamed for the genocide, due to their ‘refusal’ to save disarmed Muslim women, men and children in July 1995 from the attack of the Serbian Army. This rhetoric is common in Bosnia and also generally accepted by most people, with little questioning of the mandates and roles of Dutch peacekeepers. Even if I feel it is not right to blame the Dutch soldiers so harshly for ‘allowing’ genocide, as I do, it is hard and very sensitive to argue against this so widely accepted ‘truth’ and the people who tell it, in particular with people who are ‘victims’ or survivors of this event. I would feel uneasy and uncomfortable to go into a technical explanation of mandate and international law to a mother who lost thirty members of her immediate family. It seems pointless and even rude to go into these arguments and, therefore, much easier to let it go. At the end of the day, is it important for a survivor to know about international law when the end result was death and a loss of loved ones? I am not suggesting that we should forget what we know about the seeming facts of the situation but what is the more ethical thing to do: give way to immediate pain of the speakers in front of us or give voice to all complexities that our knowledge provides us with? What is more important, the lived experience or the intellectual insight? In reality people like me will have to find a way to accommodate both truths: pain and complexity of the actual situation.

On the other hand, scholars and international lawyers know the mandate of UN peacekeepers, the details of what happened in July 1995 and what Dutch peacekeepers tried to do to prevent the genocide, which they sense would happen a few days before it took place. The Dutch did not have enough military or any other support from NATO nor from the UN to prevent a genocide, nor did they have a mandate to use their weapons when the Serb army entered Potocari. Indeed, peacekeepers can use force only in self-defence and therefore, lack the capacity to protect civilians from grave human rights

⁴ Srebrenica was one of six UN declared ‘safe areas’ (the other were Zepa, Gorazde, Tuzla, Sarajevo, and Bihac). The UN voted to make the Bosnian town of Srebrenica a safe haven in 1993 (see UN Security Council Resolutions 819 and 836).

violations. Even if they had been given a mandate to use force, a handful of Dutch peacekeepers would hardly have been able to do anything, as they were lightly armed and outnumbered in front of thousands of Serbian armed soldiers with rifles and tanks. Moreover, rarely mentioned are the peacekeepers who did help but ended up being accused of breaching military rules for their efforts.

Indeed, when I visited Potocari a few weeks ago, for the first time I heard a story about a Dutch doctor who was part of the UN peacekeeping forces and refused the order of his commander not to leave their base and help the tired and desperate people outside. He refused the order, explaining that he was under the 'hippocratic oath' and that he would do his job no matter what consequences he would face in the future. And he did: however, instead of getting a medal for the courage and humanity that he demonstrated in an extremely difficult and dangerous situation, he was soon after faced with a court marshal and dismissed from the army.⁵

Organized visits to the Potocari site of the genocide for scholars who come from all over the world to present their papers in Bosnia is a new phenomenon that I have noticed this past year. For example, only two years ago, there was a big international conference on truth and reconciliation in Sarajevo organized by the Australian Globalism Institute. Although there were around 100 participants from all over the world, including survivors from Srebrenica who testified at the conference, there was no organized 'tour' to Potocari. No one even mentioned, perhaps they did not even consider, something like that. However, only two years later, both of the international gatherings that took place in Sarajevo over the past two months have included as part of their agenda, an 'organized visit to Potocari'. The first visit, during an international conference on genocide, happened in July during the 12th anniversary of the Srebrenica genocide. The time of the conference was originally planned for June but then it was moved to overlap with the anniversary of the genocide in Bosnia so that everyone could visit the site. The third day of conference was reserved for:

Wednesday, JULY 11: SREBRENICA REMEMBRANCE DAY

8:30 Travel to Potocari by air-conditioned bus

Bring hats, sunscreen, sunglasses, good walking shoes or sandals.

Bottled drinking water will be provided, as will a full box lunch.

Visit to Mass grave exhumation (optional)

Visit to Srebrenica (optional)

Box Lunch at Potocari factory headquarters of Dutch battalion

⁵ Story told to us in Potocari by the Dutch representative of memorial center in Potocari.

Return to Sarajevo by air-conditioned bus⁶

The only difference in the agenda of the second conference that I took part in was that the visit to the mass grave exhumation was not mentioned in the excursion program but rather a few minutes before we entered the bus that would be carrying us towards its direction. Like the first international gathering, we gathered around 8 am in an exclusive, air-conditioned bus; bottled drinking water and full box lunch was provided.

I started to question these agendas and felt an uneasy and bizarre sense of commerciality and tourism connected to such a human tragedy. I read again and again the lines about bringing ‘hats’, ‘sunscreens’ and ‘good walking shoes’ as if the people invited were hikers from some Alpine sport conference needing to be prepared for a one day excursion and fun! Except for the mention of ‘mass grave exhumation’ one could really believe that the trip was a one day adventure in the natural world of Srebrenica.

It was with mixed feelings and questions about the purpose and aim of these visits that I came to the conference in Sarajevo. I had been to Potocari once, three years ago, but I wanted to go again in order to see the new memorial stone with names of victims written on it. Also, I was interested to see if I would discover why we were going and how it had been organized because I guessed that the organization of the excursion was similar to the first conference and, as I would find out in Potocari, to many other organized visits mostly for foreigners.

We departed early morning with no clear program and agenda for the day. It was a nice sunny morning and a group of 20 of us waited with the driver of the private bus company. The bus was clean, air conditioned and indeed exclusive, hired for this particular event. Just before we exited Sarajevo, a local woman, an interpreter from Sarajevo, joined us. Most of the people in the group had digital or video cameras and had started to take shots already during our first break, two hours from Sarajevo. Indeed, everything looked like a holiday excursion except that there was no music in the bus.

Since Bosnia is a rocky country, the roads are full of curves and the graveyard in Potocari appeared just after one of these famous Bosnian curves. The graveyard emerged suddenly in front of our eyes. Maybe only the driver, the interpreter and myself were not surprised since we had been there already and knew the road very well. In that moment, I heard a loud, somewhat excited and, what I thought was a, rather inappropriate exclamation “Wow, wow, wow!” from one of my colleagues just before the sight of the graveyard. A few minutes later, we arrived in Potocari, in front of the memorial centre. We were welcomed there by the President of the memorial centre and the representative of their brotherhood memorial in the Netherlands.

By the time we arrived, the weather had changed and it was raining heavily. The president of the memorial centre invited us to come under the ‘sala’, the place inside of a graveyard that was covered and used for prayers and for talks like he was about to deliver. He briefly introduced us to the history of the events that had happened at the very

⁶ 2007 IAGS Meeting Program Responding to Genocide Before It's Too Late Genocide Studies and Prevention, Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina 9 – 13 July 2007
<<http://migs.concordia.ca/IAGSConferenceProgram.htm>> at 1 September 2007.

place on which we stood and to the site around us. He said that to date around 3000 people had been identified and buried and that it was expected that 5000 more would be identified. He also mentioned that the process of identification was very slow because the Serbs had organized the removal of human remains from primary to secondary and tertiary mass graves during September and October 1995. According to the President, Serb officials hoped that, by removing bodies from the primary grave, they would not be found or, at least, would not be connected to the genocide in Srebrenica. As a consequence of this action, the mutilated human parts of one person could be found in five different mass graves. These circumstances have made the process of identification of missing persons even harder and has left around 12500 persons still to be found.

The President of the memorial center also mentioned that the Dutch peacekeepers who were present on the day that the genocide had started did not only do nothing to help the refugees and internally displaced persons but also “gave their UN uniforms and arms” to the Serb army. The Serbian army, dressed in peacekeepers uniforms and armed with UN arms, drove in UN tanks after Muslim men who ran through the woods towards Tuzla, trying to save their lives. According to the President, almost 4000 men were killed in the woods while trying to reach Tuzla and the rest were killed in Potocari. This was the first time I had heard the claim that the Dutch battalion intentionally ‘gave’ arms and uniforms to the Serbian army. I was a bit surprised as it sounded like they were really ‘collaborators’ in the crime that happened.

As an insider, with mixed feelings of uneasiness and fear about questioning someone who is also a ‘victim’/survivor, I did not ask the President to explain his accusation that the Dutch peacekeepers ‘gave away’ their clothes and arms. Actually, no one asked any questions after his brief talk and we all went to the ‘memorial room’ in Potocari that is just across from the graveyard in a huge complex where machining tools were once fabricated. While my colleagues could and did take the pictures of the President while he was speaking as well as the graveyard, taking pictures in the memorial room itself was strongly forbidden.

Inside the memorial room the first thing you will see is an open notebook and a pen to write down your thoughts if you would like to do so. There is also a bathroom at the entrance. The Memorial Room is actually a devastated factory, comprising a large, abandoned and empty space, in the heart of which a small cinema was set up. The cinema is made for ‘tourists’ and shows the short movie “Srebrenica July 1995”. I felt nervous about watching the film, as I thought it might be moving and disturbing. I felt uneasy just thinking of what I might see. However, I joined the group and watched a twenty minute movie that presented a mix of archival material from the war time and the stories of survivors, mainly women. Each woman had a similar story about their separation from their loved ones, husbands or sons or both. None of the women were identified by name so I felt like their sole identity was that of ‘mother’ and ‘wife’. Nothing else seemed important. Does anyone care about their names? Is it important for the story? Maybe not, but I felt how I missed their identity. Nameless, their faces seemed all the same and their tears mixed with my tears and tears of the female Bosnian interpreter sitting next to me. I noted one thing that they all had in common: they all regretted that they had not done more to save their loved ones, because some of them had said nothing before their

children or husbands were taken away, or because they did not say more. Feelings of guilt were written all over them. I learned that having too much power often leads to a sense of guilt but so does feeling powerless.

Across from this ad hoc cinema there was a small exhibition called “Life Stories”, an art project where one could look at photographs of 20 men killed in July 1995, read their biographies or life stories and view an object found in their clothes at the time of identification (comb, watch, letter written to their families, for example). I liked this very much as I faced human beings and could see their faces and eyes and not only picture them abstractly as ‘numbers’, as victims of Srebrenica are usually presented.

After visiting the memorial room, our group waited by the bus that would take us to the mass grave exhumation site. Just before getting onto the bus, the Dutch representative of the memorial center mentioned that we were about to leave for the mass grave and that it ‘will be hard and disturbing.’ I thought I had not properly understood where we were about to go, so I asked colleague if had heard it correctly. She confirmed. I was astonished and felt paralyzed thinking of the mass grave and could not believe that I was about to see the ‘real’ one. I was thinking of whether I should go or not as the driver hurried us because it was raining and we needed to catch up with the people who were working on the exhumation. With feelings of fear, shock, disbelief and uneasiness I sat on the bus. What else could I do? I also felt that it was my ‘duty’ to go as a ‘good scholar’ and researcher and push my boundaries as much as I could.

What I saw in Zeleni Jadar, the location of the mass grave, will stay in my mind forever. A huge hole, white and blue plastic bags and covers over pieces of bodies, my former neighbours. I stood there, close to the bulldozer used to dig up the ground. Murat, the man who has been doing this job for twelve years, stood there with his smiling face and welcomed us. He was around fifty, had green boots and wore warm, working clothes. He was once a teacher, twice captured and interned in concentration camps. He said he voluntarily started this ‘job’ 12 years ago and spoke for next hour about what he was doing. I noticed his will to talk a lot and in detail and how he mentioned several times how “happy” he was that he could do this. He explained that by ‘happy’, he meant that every time he dug out the bones and pieces of bodies that would be identified by the pathologist and forensics he knew that he was bringing ‘peace’ to one family who has been searching for its missing loved one. He said that he had become a real expert since he could ‘discover’ a mass grave by observing the land, plants and animals, by using people’s stories and other methods that he could not tell us about.

After half an hour, since it was raining heavily and was cold and windy, one of the organizers suggested we enter the bus and Murat continue his story inside so that we would not be standing in the cold and rain. Murat replied by criticizing (half seriously half joking) us, future scientists and scholars who ‘can not stand half an hour in the rain’ while he has been doing this incredible job in rain, snow, wind. He also asked us how we could be good scholars if we could not stand in the rain for half an hour - at least we could do that, couldn’t we? Murat was probably right and I felt ashamed because I also felt cold, my shoes were soaked and I thought it was a good idea to go in the bus. At the same time, I thought it was not fair to put this feeling of ‘guilt’ on us. After Murat gave

us, through a smile, a lecture on being 'good scholar', no one dared to move towards the bus. We all stayed standing in the rain.

All the time Murat was talking, I listened to him carefully but also observed my colleagues. I was curious as to how people from the 'outside' would react to his story. They asked him all kind of questions, while I could not ask any. My eyes were wandering towards the site of the mass grave and then to faces of other people next to me. At one moment, I looked at my shoes and could not believe what I saw. There, lying under my feet, was a jacket in the mud. I could only see the sleeves and some other fragments because there was mud all over it, but there was no doubt it was a jacket. I kept staring and asking myself whether it must have belonged to someone from the mass grave. I wanted to ask but could not open my mouth and I was terrified I would get a positive answer to my question.

After 40 minutes of talking, Murat 'invited' us to come closer to the grave and asked if anyone wanted to see some human remains, as he was willing to uncover the plastic and show us. I did not move from where I stood. Neither did my Bosnian colleagues. All the others joined him and went to 'peer' into the mass grave. They were taking photos. The interpreter who was Bosnian as well said that she would not come closer but Murat continued to talk even though no one was there to translate.

It was finally time to depart. I could hardly wait to leave this place. Someone commented while we were getting on the bus that Murat was "obviously addicted". I wondered what my colleague meant by this; perhaps he was applying that Murat was 'too invested' in telling his story over and over. The next comment from the same colleague was "why don't internationals do his job?" My colleague was judging emotional behaviour of a victim and suggesting that 'outside professionals' could do it better because of their lack of 'emotional involvement.' I could not stop thinking about Murat. Why is it always assumed that internationals 'can do it' better? I thought my colleague's comment was rather inappropriate and devalued the appalling jobs that some locals were doing to help their people. I felt insulted, probably because Murat was 'one of my people'.

While preparing for departure, there was a suggestion that we should have lunch and indeed organizers brought lunch boxes from the luggage and gave one to each of us. The interpreter asked, incredulous: "You will eat here in this place, in front of the mass grave?" Her question was spoken quietly and everyone started to bite on their sandwiches. The driver turned the key and we departed with sandwiches in our hands and mouths.

As there was no clear plan, or at least we did not know of one, I was not sure where we would go next. Soon I found out. We would go to the factory again but this time, to the part where the Dutch peacekeepers used to be stationed. A representative of the Dutch memorial center who also works in Potocari opened the map of Bosnia in front of what was once the Dutch peacekeepers base. She started to talk about what had happened in July 1995, at the very place we were standing. Everyone was looking at the map and following her except me and one or two other people. I already felt emotionally and physically exhausted and was still in a state of shock at the sight of the mass grave.

While the woman was talking about events that took place in July 1995, someone asked if the Dutch peacekeepers really gave uniforms and arms to Serbian soldiers, as we had heard from the President of the memorial center. I was happy someone asked this question as it demonstrated that some other people in the group were surprised about this claim as well. She replied softly: "Yes, but of course not intentionally, they were forced to do so." I felt that woman was happy to be given the opportunity to clear up misunderstandings about this particular action on behalf of Dutch peacekeepers. She told me later that she actually could not believe that the President of the memorial center had said this. She felt uncomfortable and said that it was 'not fair' to say that the peacekeepers had done it willingly. However, she also did not 'dare' to object anything the President said since he was the 'victim' and she was 'an outsider', and because anytime she had tried to object to anything in the past, she would be shut up by comments like 'you know nothing since you are not from here'. We briefly talked about the political and moral sensitivity of objecting to something a 'victim' is saying and how it is hard to work in such circumstances. Although I talked to her only briefly, I felt that we could understand each other and had the same sentiments. Perhaps she felt more open to me since I approached her and told her that I thought it was not fair to put such blame on the Dutch peacekeepers. I also realized while talking to her how much of a burden Dutch people now carry on their shoulders as well.

After her brief talk in front of the factory, the woman took us inside what was once the Dutch base in Potocari where we could see the Dutch peacekeepers' graffiti and other pictures they had drawn on the wall. We wandered through this devastated and abandoned place with our cameras. I could almost picture the ordinary lives of the peacekeepers that were once sharing this space. I could also imagine hundreds of women, men and children sitting on floors and waiting for execution. At one point, I turned to my colleague and said: "Is this really my country? Am I in my country?" I can not describe my emotions. I could see that the Dutch woman was explaining the graffiti and wall drawings but I could not hear her. I was in 1995, imagining how it looked then.

When we finished the tour of the Dutch base, outside, waiting for us, was Munira, the President of the Mothers of Srebrenica. I knew Munira from before. She took us to her office which is part of the complex of the former Dutch base. I thought how incredibly strong these women must be to work everyday at the very place where they last saw their sons and husbands.

We sat in the office and Munira offered us drinks. I had heard her speak before and every time I felt the same: sadness and admiration for her work. Every time she speaks she says that not all Serbs are guilty for the crime, but that those who are must be brought to justice and punished. She said that she could not ever forgive nor forget the crimes that the Serb army committed. She also talked about the life of mothers who had lost their beloved ones and who are living and praying not to die before they find and bury the bones of their sons. Munira talked about the horror of waiting to find the pieces of their once strong and healthy children and about how a mother feels when she finds one finger or one bone from her son who was once beautiful and healthy. Her biggest fear is to die before she finds the bones of her family members, so she said 'you can imagine what life that is'.

The last thing she said was that she hoped that we would disseminate the truth about the events in Srebrenica. She said that lots of internationals had come to Bosnia to help the country, but the majority actually did so for 'their own benefit'. After she finished there was an uneasy silence in the room. We were all without words and I started to feel very uncomfortable. I hoped someone would say 'thank you' or something like that. Someone finally said their thanks and I think we all felt relieved. I stayed for a while with Munira to say hello and she gave me a bunch of postcards that had been made by the children of Srebrenica. She wished me good luck in my life and I did the same, although I felt strange and stupid to be saying such a thing.

We then went back to the graveyard for a few more minutes. There is a small souvenir shop across from the graveyard and I entered it out of curiosity. I stayed there for ten minutes, talking to a woman who was trying to sell something to 'tourists'. She was complaining that no one had entered the shop since the morning even though we were the third busload to come that day. I knew that this woman had lost someone as well and that she was trying to survive somehow. This was probably the only income that she could make. I felt almost ashamed for not buying anything from her and said that I would try to convince someone from my group to come and do some shopping. I also wanted to buy something but could not. 'What could I buy?' I kept asking myself: everything inside had mark of genocide. Do I really want to put a souvenir of genocide in the cupboard? Can I wear a T-shirt with genocide written all over it with bloody letters? I felt awkward and guilty but I did not buy anything. Finally, some of colleagues went inside and bought a few postcards. One of them said to me "I wanted so desperately to buy something but could not. Everything had the mark of genocide. I just can't but I wanted to leave some money." My colleague apparently felt the same way as I did.

Finally, around 5 pm we left for a restaurant in Srebrenica where our hosts had booked dinner for us. While driving towards the restaurant, someone was asking for directions and the interpreter said "it is 50m on the right-hand side of the mass grave". My colleague repeated this sentence to me. I thought about such new 'road signs' in Bosnia and needed a few minutes to understand and accept the sentence that had been just said in very ordinary, serious way. Again, I thought with disbelief, "Is this really my country?"

We left Srebrenica when iftar⁷ was about to start. The mayor of Srebrenica had come with other people from the village to have dinner in the same restaurant. Music was suddenly playing very loudly. We departed from Srebrenica with night falling, leaving behind the smiling faces of the people in the restaurant. I felt like I was in the twilight zone, wondering if it all was just a dream or if everything that day had really happened. I could hardly find any sense between images of the graveyard, the mass grave, the factory where people were looking for refuge, the delicious dinner, smiling faces of people and loud music. This is the country that I come from...A mixture of genocide, horror, tourism, the struggle to survive and the continuation of life. All at once and all in one country, indeed inside myself as well.

⁷ Refers to the evening meal for breaking the daily fast during a Muslim religious observance in the month of Ramadan.

A Post Scriptum

For the record, in the middle of October 2007, the Dutch peacekeeper veterans who were in Potocari on July 11, 1995 and who were blamed for not preventing and even being complicit in the genocide, came to meet the mothers of Srebrenica. They initiated this gathering since “they cannot sleep and normally live” after this event as Munira from Mothers of Srebrenica told us. This gathering was just between them and the women survivors, behind closed doors. One can imagine the feelings in the room when they met eye to eye for first time after all these years.