

The Fall of Srebrenica

A ja sam tada imala samo jedanaest godina. Stajala sam na istom ovome mjestu i za razliku od danas, bilo me je užasno strab. Pored mene je stajalo bezbroj uplašene djece, tužnih žena i skrbanih staraca i svi skupa gledali smo kako mržnja ubija čovjeka. I danas pamtim kako odvedoše oca i njegov posljednji pogled upucen mom prekinutom djetinjstvu.

And I was only eleven at the time. I stood at this very place and, unlike today, I was scared to death. Numerous frightened children, sad women and broken old men stood next to me and all of us watched the hatred killing human beings. I still remember the moment when they took my father away and his last glance cast at my interrupted childhood.

Advija Ibrahimovic (Excerpt from remarks at the opening ceremony of the Srebrenica-Potočari Memorial Center, September 20, 2003)

If inaction characterized the international community's response to the events of July 1995, then documenting the story of the enclave and its fall, its mass graves, and its missing has become a principal means of redressing the failure to act. There are the official governmental reckonings: the United Nations Report of the Secretary General pursuant to General Assembly resolution 53/35 (1999), the report commissioned by the French National Assembly (Assemblée nationale 2001), and the Dutch Parliament–commissioned report of the Netherlands Institute for War Documentation (Nederlands Instituut voor Oorlogsdocumentatie [NIOD] 2002). In addition to detailing the Bosnian Serb forces' crimes, all of these documents address the issue of the international community's complicity in the fall of the safe area and the deaths of more than

8,000 Bosniak men and boys. The International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) has also created an extensive body of evidence documenting the event through the trials of indicted war criminals. Official testimony, such as that of Dražen Erdemovic, one of the Bosnian Serb Army soldiers who participated in the executions of the Bosniak men, as well as the evidence in the trial of General Radislav Krstic, who was convicted of genocide in 2002, provides a comprehensive chronicle of the circumstances, decisions, and actions that resulted in the deportation and execution of the enclave's residents.¹

Perhaps the most powerful and shocking evidence of the Srebrenica genocide to reach the public appeared during the trial of former Serbian president Slobodan Milošević. On June 1, 2005, the prosecution showed a video of a Serbian special police unit called the Scorpions (Škorpioni) as its members transported, abused, and finally executed six young civilian prisoners from Srebrenica. Local and international television stations broadcast approximately five minutes of this chilling footage, released to the public by ICTY from the two-hour tape, over the following week and during the days leading up to the ten-year anniversary of the genocide. The horrifying seconds of cold-blooded execution captured by the often ill-trained camera lens thrust the human faces of victims and perpetrators into living rooms throughout the region and the world.²

Arguably the most politically significant Bosnian report documenting the fall of the enclave came from the RS Commission for Investigation of the Events in and around Srebrenica between July 10 and July 19, 1995. Compelled by the Human Rights Chamber for Bosnia and Herzegovina in a decision resulting from claims filed by families of the Srebrenica missing, the Bosnian Serb government established the commission in 2003.³ After stalled efforts and much political arm-twisting, including the decision by the Office of the High Representative (OHR) to remove commission members deemed biased and to reject early drafts of its findings, the commission issued its preliminary report in June 2004. Its contents prompted the first official recognition by the Bosnian Serb government of the war crimes committed at Srebrenica. In a televised appearance, the RS president at the time, Dragan Čavic, stated, "The Report . . . is the beginning of difficult, and probably, for all of us, sometimes the empty road of disclosing of the truth. It is on relevant state bodies and institutions to process these and such results of the Commission's work, and it is on us to continue walking towards the truth. Only this is the way to avoid the situation of having our children

hate each other in the future, only because they are Croats, Bosniaks, or Serbs.”⁴ The RS government accepted the commission’s report in its entirety through the adoption of its conclusions in a special session on October 28, 2004.

In addition to the tribunal’s growing pool of evidence and the various governmental fact-seeking accounts, several foreign journalists and scholars have written books analyzing the fall of Srebrenica (Honig and Both 1996; Neuffer 2002; Power 2002), the most in-depth and compelling of which include the Pulitzer Prize-winning reporter David Rohde’s *Endgame* (1997) and Chuck Sudetic’s *Blood and Vengeance* (1998).⁵ Both Rohde and Sudetic incorporate testimonial accounts of life during and after the fall of the safe area and thus contain especially character-driven narratives of the event and its aftermath.

Since the end of the war, local nongovernmental organizations have sponsored several factual and analytical accounts of the fall of the Srebrenica safe area. In 1998, the Women of Srebrenica published a collection of testimonies, *Samrtno Srebreničko ljeto '95* (Srebrenica’s Deadly Summer 1995; Žene Srebrenice 1998b), which was later translated into Dutch. In 2003, the Women of Srebrenica and former UN translator Hasan Nuhanovic produced two texts based on collaborative research conducted among Srebrenica survivors: *Uloga međunarodnih elemenata u Srebrenici “zaštićenju zoni” —hronologija, analiza i komentari* (The Role of International Elements in the Srebrenica “Safe Area” —Chronology, Analysis, and Commentary; Nuhanovic 2003) and *Kolekcija 107 izjava o ulozi međunarodne zajednice u Srebrenici “zaštićenju zoni” UN-a* (A Collection of 107 Statements about the Role of the International Community in the Srebrenica “Safe Area”; Žene Srebrenice 2003).⁶ Other works include *Genocid u Srebrenici “sigurnoj zoni” Ujedinjenih nacija, jula 1995* (Genocide in Srebrenica, the United Nations “Safe Area,” in July 1995; Čekić, Kreso, and Macić 2001), *Sjećanje na Srebrenicu* (Memories of Srebrenica; Mustafić 2003), and *Knjiga o Srebrenici* (A Book about Srebrenica; Sadik Salimović 2002). Timed for optimal public exposure, a spate of books, scholarly and journalistic, came out during the summer of 2005 to coincide with the commemorative activities (Biserko 2005; Matton 2005; Suljagić 2005).

Finally, there are several films about the genocide, the most notable being the BBC documentary *Cry from the Grave*, Maria Warsinski’s *Crimes and Punishment*, and the Federation Commission for Missing Persons’ *Marš smrti* (March of Death), all of which include footage of the Bosnian Serb forces entering the enclave, assembled at the compound

at Potočari, and later with Bosniak captives. Like the Scorpion tape, these films succeed in placing the more abstract facts of the genocide (the estimated 8,000 missing) within a more visceral context of human suffering because they contain the faces and words of both the victims and the perpetrators. One such moment from the film *Cry from the Grave* has made its indelible mark on my own experience of researching the identification of Srebrenica's missing. In the glare of the midday sun, a father is forced by his Bosnian Serb captors to stand up and call out to his son, who is hiding in the hills above, urging the young man to surrender himself. He cups his hands around his mouth and makes the harrowing appeal, repeating his son's name in the vocative case, "Nermine, Nermine." The scene has remained with me, and whenever I pass along that road, by the spot where this man once begged for his son to join him, I recall his voice and that unsettling plea.

THE START OF THE WAR

The events of July 1995 are often dissected within the narrow confines of the Bosnian war. It is important to recognize, however, that the turmoil punctuating the final decade of the twentieth century in Bosnia echoed earlier periods of unrest in the land of the South Slavs—unrest inextricably bound to shifting political forces internal and external to former Yugoslavia. In the nineteenth century amid the rise of nationalism throughout Europe, changing borders between the Ottoman and Austro-Hungarian empires led to heightened militarization in the region. Stirred by the Balkan Wars of 1912–1913, competing European interests in the South Slav lands, namely those of Russia and the Dual Monarch, culminated in 1914 in the assassination of the Austrian archduke Franz Ferdinand by Gavrilo Princip, a member of the Serbian nationalist movement, Mlada Bosna.

Four years later, the end of World War I ushered in a new era of the nation-state, underwritten by the victors' expansionist principle of self-determination, out of which emerged the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, built around the core land of Serbia. Despite the so-called unification of the South Slavic peoples, tension arising from national claims to territory and resources nevertheless persisted throughout the interwar period. Indeed, once World War II broke out, Bosnia and Herzegovina became an easy target for annexation by the Independent State of Croatia, a puppet regime of Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy.⁷ As we will see in chapter 6, the occupation of the region by the Axis powers split alle-

giances along national and ideological lines—from the Croatian fascists and Serb royalists to the communist Partisans. While Communist Party leader Josip Broz Tito succeeded in tamping down nationalist movements in the post–World War II years, the collapse of socialist Yugoslavia in the 1980s prompted disputes among the autonomous republics over power, territory, and the control of economic resources. Often the political discourse framing these claims recalled the century’s two previous wars, recasting the past violence and human loss in predominantly ethno-national terms.

War broke out in Bosnia and Herzegovina in the spring of 1992, following political upheaval and armed conflict already gripping other parts of former Yugoslavia.⁸ With Slovenia’s declaration of independence from the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia on June 25, 1991, and the ten-day armed conflict with the Serb-controlled Yugoslav Jugoslovenska narodna armija (JNA [Yugoslav People’s National Army]) opposed to its withdrawal, the state of Yugoslavia unraveled swiftly. Croatia declared its independence on that same day in June and entered into armed conflict with Serbia (that is, the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, which also included Montenegro) and the JNA shortly thereafter. Five months later, the JNA and local Serbian forces occupied over one-third of Croatia, with 15,000 people killed and 250,000 displaced by the conflict. The UN Security Council imposed an arms embargo on Yugoslavia in September 1991, thus tipping the military balance in favor of Serbia and the JNA.

Embroiled in a war whose front lines were pushing into the multiethnic territory of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia and Serbia began to seek the partition of the land and people that lay between their two states. The most ethnically mixed of the Yugoslav territories, Bosnia’s population was made up of three ethno-national groups (*narod*):⁹ Bosnian Muslims, or Bosniaks (44 percent); Bosnian Serbs (31 percent); and Bosnian Croats (17 percent).¹⁰ With conflict breaking out among their neighbors, Bosnians from all three groups were forced to contemplate their future status within an independent Bosnia and Herzegovina, a Croat-controlled territory, or a territory that remained part of the rump state of Yugoslavia. Many Bosnian Serbs resisted the idea of a Sarajevo-based government, which, they worried, would create a Bosnian Muslim-oriented state (Ramet 2002:118–119; Gagnon 2004:76–77). Bosnian Croats looked to Zagreb for support and direction.¹¹ The Bosniaks feared the consequences of a war of aggression waged by their Croatian and Serbian neighbors. “The Bosnian

Muslims as a people (*narod*) were blocking a simple two-way partition of Bosnia and Herzegovina, both politically and by their numerically strong presence in all parts of Bosnia and Herzegovina, both rural and urban, where they lived among Serbs and Croats” (Bringa 2002:214). For Bosniaks, the division of Bosnia between those two states posed the threat of their forced displacement or outright annihilation. The brutal targeting of civilian populations by Serbian forces in places like Vukovar only heightened such fears.

In November 1991, Bosnian Serbs, led by Radovan Karadžić, head of the Serb Nationalist Party (Srpska demokratska stranka, or SDS), voted in a referendum held throughout predominantly Serb areas of the territory on whether they wished to remain in Yugoslavia. The overwhelming majority who participated voted “yes” (Bringa 2002:198). Although the Bosnian government declared the referendum invalid, by January 9, 1992, the SDS had already established the Serbian Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina, later renamed the Republika Srpska (RS). Bosnian voters took up the issue of the territory’s political course in a referendum held on February 29 and March 1, 1992. Following the examples of Slovenia, Croatia, and Macedonia, Bosniaks and Bosnian Croats voted for independence. The result, however, was undermined by the Bosnian Serb political leadership, the majority of whose constituency refused to participate in the referendum. Determined to thwart the effort to break away from Yugoslavia, SDS leaders had called on the territory’s Serbs to boycott the vote.

On April 6, 1992, the European Community recognized the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina, and the United States followed suit the next day. Serb forces laid siege to Sarajevo, and shortly thereafter, violence erupted in the northern and eastern parts of Bosnia, including the Podrinje region, which lay to the west of the Drina River, immediately opposite Serbia. Serbian leaders regarded the central Podrinje region, which included Srebrenica, as strategically significant for establishing a Serbian political entity that would stretch beyond the border of the Drina River. During the Krstić trial at the ICTY, defense witness General Radovan Radinović outlined this objective:

[Serbs] wanted to live in the same state with other Serbs, and the only state that could guarantee that was the former Yugoslavia. . . . the Serbs realised that the area of the Central Podrinje had a huge strategic importance for them. Without the area of Central Podrinje, there would be no Republika Srpska, there would be no territorial integrity of Serb ethnic territories; instead the Serb population would be forced to accept

the so-called enclave status in their ethnic territories. The territory would be split into two, the whole area would be disintegrated, and it would be separated from Serbia proper and from areas which are inhabited almost 100 percent by Serb populations. (ICTY Prosecutor v. Radislav Krstic 2001, par. 12)

To seize control of this territory, Serbian paramilitary forces such as Arkan's Tigers, whose ranks included convicted criminals recruited from Serbian prisons, swept through the Podrinje region. Working together with Bosnian Serb forces, they carried out the violent campaign to rid villages and cities of their non-Serb populations. The program of ethnic cleansing involved mass killings, forced displacement, torture and rape, and the destruction of private and public property, including religious objects.¹²

The notion of "cleaning up" territory in order to render it ethnically homogenous for some Serb leaders entailed the complete disappearance of the opposing ethnic group. In the case of the Podrinje region this meant the disappearance of the Bosniak population. Several months earlier, when arguing against independence before the Bosnian Parliament (even though he was not actually an elected official at that point), Radovan Karadžić spoke about the possible disappearance of the Muslim people in a thinly veiled threat, "Don't you think that you are going to lead Bosnia into hell, and probably the Muslim people into disappearance (*nestanak*) because the Muslim people cannot defend itself[?]-[It] is going to war" (quoted in Bringa 2002:221). It is difficult to know precisely what Karadžić intended by the word "disappearance"—that is, whether he meant the forced displacement of Muslim populations or their complete annihilation. In any case, within months, both displacement and mass killings were taking place throughout Bosnia, and the term *missing persons* (*nestale osobe*, or *nestali*) evolved from a mere threat to an actual category of persons in wartime Bosnia. In its postwar application, *nestali* would become the primary epithet for the victims of the Srebrenica genocide.

With the bloody attack on Zvornik, the major city on the Drina River to the north of Višegrad, in early April 1992, Bosniaks in the city of Srebrenica became nervous. Journalist and teacher Mirsad Mustafić, who fled Srebrenica in the spring of 1992 and covered the enclave throughout the war, writes, "In the center of the city people began to gather in groups and seek more information. After Arkan's men's attack on Zvornik, a powerful wave of flight had begun. Some headed toward Montenegro and Macedonia, others toward Tuzla and then on to the

West [Europe]” (2003:36). With a prewar population of about 5,800, Srebrenica was a predominantly Bosniak city. In the larger municipality of Srebrenica, which stretched over 527 square kilometers and had a population of just over 37,000, Bosniaks were the ethnic majority, with 73 percent (27,118) of the total population; Bosnian Serbs made up 25 percent (9,380) (Salimovic 2002:205).¹³ Like the other majority Bosniak cities and villages in the Podrinje region, Srebrenica lay closer to Serbia than it did to the protection of the Army of the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina (Bosnian Army). Local Bosnian Serb leaders considered that part of the country to be Serbian, not Bosnian, “a centuries-old Serbian hearth/home” (Mustafic 2003:37), and as political tensions heightened with the encroaching violence, the Serb representatives seized control of the municipality. On April 13, 1992, Srebrenica’s municipal parliament met for the last time. Although SDS representatives declared that there would be no war, they moved that all future meetings be held in Bratunac, the Bosnian Serb-controlled city to the north of Srebrenica, and in Ljubovija, the Serbian city across the Drina River from Bratunac.

On April 18, 1992, paramilitary units from Serbia, supported by local Bosnian Serbs, attacked Srebrenica, setting houses on fire, looting shops, and killing twenty-seven people. The overwhelming majority of residents had already fled in anticipation of the violence. The 365 who remained hid in the outlying hills, watching their city burn from afar. The occupation lasted until May 9, when the Bosnian Army recaptured the city. Srebrenica quickly became a pocket of “free” (i.e., Bosniak-controlled) territory, an enclave into which refugees streamed from throughout the Podrinje region—from Bratunac, Vlasenica, Zvornik, Bijelina, Rogatica, Višegrad, and Han Pijesak. By the end of 1992, with medical and food supplies cut off and Srebrenica’s population rising to 30,000, famine, disease, and attacks from Bosnian Serb forces had ravaged the enclave.¹⁴ “The first thing you notice about Srebrenica and its victims is the hunger and sickness. The population is growing sick mostly from basic illnesses such as the consequences of malnutrition. Women are dying in great numbers from childbirth because they cannot bear the exhaustion and then the babies [die] because the mothers cannot feed them. The wounded are a story for remembering. The devastated hospital without basic medicines and instruments received around thirty wounded people a day” (Mustafic 2003:88). Without one trained surgeon among them, the doctors performed operations only during the day because there was no electricity; when alcohol ran

out, they used battery acid to disinfect wounds and performed amputations using saws without the aid of anesthesia. The Bosnian Serbs cut off the city's water supply, forcing people to use private wells and wash their clothes in the local streams, whose water had high concentrations of minerals that stained the clothing a permanent rust color.

During the first year in the enclave, people were literally starving to death. The local Bosnian defense, led by Naser Oric, conducted raids on outlying Serb villages ostensibly to seize food, but, as the ICTY indictment against him later charged, also to exact punishment on the local Serb population for the Bosnian Serb Army's harassment of the enclave.¹⁵ Through these attacks, Oric's troops succeeded in extending the borders of the enclave to its peak size of 900 square kilometers by January 1993. On several of the raids, Oric's men killed Serb villagers, including women and children. The most infamous attack was against the village of Kravica on the Orthodox celebration of Christmas, January 7, 1993, when Oric's men killed forty-three Serbs, thirteen of whom were civilians (ICTY 2005).¹⁶ Following the troops on these raids, *torbari* (literally, bag people) from the enclave swept through the targeted villages, cleaning out the food supplies and anything else they wanted and could carry back with them to the enclave.

The looting of nearby Serb villages could not stem the widespread hunger among the enclave's population and only further angered the Bosnian Serb forces that surrounded the area. It was difficult to deliver supplies to the isolated city. The first UNHCR convoy carrying humanitarian aid arrived in November 1992, but the Bosnian Serbs turned back or looted subsequent shipments. With the Bosnian Serbs' violent recapture of the villages of Cerska and Konjevic Polje in February 1993, the enclave's population ballooned to upwards of 50,000.¹⁷ "They take up residence wherever they arrive. On the Tokoljački hill, a village formed in a dilapidated house, where entire families live. In the city there's no longer any room. And the small number of stock that had existed, the war has eaten up. Epidemics rage through the city. Thousands of people throughout the day tend fires with a couple of blankets and sleep on the sidewalks. Filth, despair, and incurable grief" (Mustafic 2003:89).

The United Nations finally responded to the humanitarian crisis in Srebrenica in March 1993, and its subsequent decisions profoundly affected the fate of the enclave and its inhabitants. US Air Force planes began to parachute in pallets of food and supplies, but again, given the swelling numbers of people and the desperate conditions, the support did little to allay the suffering. Dismayed by reports she had received

about massacres within the northern section of the Srebrenica enclave, UNHCR director Sadako Ogata sent a letter to UN secretary general Boutros Boutros-Ghali in which she recommended that the UN evacuate the refugees living in Srebrenica to Tuzla. Her letter prompted General Philippe Morillon, commander of the UN forces in Bosnia, to visit the enclave to assess the situation. On March 5 he traveled with an assembly of relief workers and a British military unit to Konjevic Polje, the cluster of hamlets in the northern part of the enclave where the Bosnian Serb Army had attacked days before. Unalarmed by what he saw there, Morillon returned to Tuzla later that day and explained to reporters, “‘As a soldier, I, unfortunately, have the knack for smelling death. I didn’t smell it. . . . The most important thing at the present time is to break this vicious circle. . . . Srebrenica is in no danger’” (Sudetic 1998:176). One of the relief workers, a doctor from the World Health Organization, apparently had a better sense of smell. Having broken off from Morillon’s entourage, Simon Mardel walked on from Konjevic Polje to Srebrenica, where he saw firsthand the daily death toll, and sent back reports about the enclave’s dire humanitarian conditions. On March 10 Morillon was forced to set out for Srebrenica with a convoy that included food trucks. After Serb commanders tried to turn back the column and detain the food convoy, Morillon and a small segment of the initial group of vehicles were allowed to proceed into Srebrenica. The Bosniak leadership in Sarajevo took advantage of the situation, sending word to Naser Oric to detain Morillon. “‘Do it in a civilized way. . . . Use women and children’” (Sudetic 1998:179). Surrounded by women of all ages—including mothers who placed their small children under the wheels of his car—Morillon was trapped. They begged for, indeed demanded, help. Late that night, the French general attempted to sneak out of the enclave, hiking to Potočari, where his car was ready to meet him. But his ruse was foiled, and Morillon returned to Srebrenica, to an even more embittered and demanding crowd.

On March 13 General Morillon found the words to win over the refugees and secure his own release. From the rooftop of the post office he shouted through a bullhorn to the people assembled below, “You are now under the protection of the United Nations. . . . I will never abandon you” (Rohde 1997:xv). In his hand he held the UN flag, to be raised over the city of Srebrenica. During my fieldwork both in Srebrenica and Tuzla, I would hear that proclamation repeated, even acted out, by numerous survivors when they described their experiences in the enclave and specifically when they spoke about the United

Nations' role in its tragic end. It was difficult for them to reconcile the promise made by the French general—the commander of UN forces in Bosnia no less—with the events of July 1995. In a message to the UN military headquarters in Sarajevo later that day, which he directed for release to the media, Morillon wrote, “Fully conscious that a major tragedy was about to take place in Srebrenica I deliberately came here. And I have now decided to stay here in Srebrenica in order to calm the population’s anguish, in order to try to save them” (Sudetic 1998:182). He left shortly thereafter.

With Morillon’s departure and his promises of the imminent delivery of more humanitarian aid, many people in the enclave believed their protection was ensured. Others were more skeptical, viewing Morillon within the context of the French government’s engagement in the war.¹⁸ Mirsad Mustafic wrote in a newspaper column on April 1, 1993, “Altruism as a strong suit of character is not one the French have ever possessed. Morillon cannot be the exception” (2003:92). Regardless of the context from which it sprung, Morillon’s declaration of UN protection changed the enclave’s conditions and its status in the eyes of the international community. The humanitarian convoys that subsequently delivered food and supplies to the city also evacuated around 5,000 women, children, and elderly people. Helicopters evacuated another 500 severely wounded.¹⁹

Just one month later, however, the Serbs, who had slackened their grip on the enclave, once again pounded its defenses, and Srebrenica’s leaders sought negotiations for the surrender of the enclave. With Morillon’s bold and well-publicized proclamation about Srebrenica being under UN protection, the United Nations Security Council was forced to respond to the renewed Serb aggression. It passed Resolution 819, demanding “that all parties and others concerned treat Srebrenica and its surroundings as a safe area which should be free from any armed attack or any other hostile act” (UN Security Council 1993a). Through the resolution, the Security Council recognized the vulnerable state of the enclave and the danger faced by its civilian residents as long as the Bosnian Serb forces continued to attack it, citing among other points that it was

- concerned by the pattern of hostilities by Bosnian Serb paramilitary units against towns and villages in eastern Bosnia and in this regard reaffirming that any taking or acquisition of territory by the threat or use of force, including through the practice of “ethnic cleansing”, is unlawful and unacceptable,

- deeply alarmed at the information provided by the Secretary-General to the Security Council on 16 April 1993 on the rapid deterioration of the situation in Srebrenica and its surrounding areas, as a result of the continued deliberate armed attacks and shelling of the innocent civilian population by Bosnian Serb paramilitary units, . . .
- aware that a tragic humanitarian emergency has already developed in Srebrenica and its surrounding areas as a direct consequence of the brutal actions of Bosnian Serb paramilitary units, forcing the large-scale displacement of civilians, in particular women, children and the elderly. (UN Security Council 1993a)

To protect Srebrenica and the five other Muslim-held enclaves, each given the status of safe areas (Sarajevo, Tuzla, Bihac, Žepa, and Gorazdje), the UN needed to send troops.²⁰ Boutros-Ghali told the Security Council that the mission would require 30,000 soldiers. “Thanks largely to the American refusal to contribute soldiers and fatigue among European states with troops already in Bosnia, only a tiny fraction of the forces needed to man, monitor, and defend these pockets arrived. President Clinton himself called the safe areas ‘shooting galleries’“ (Power 2002:303). Conferred with the status of a United Nations “safe area,” Srebrenica received the meager protection of a contingency of UNPROFOR (United Nations Protection Force) troops from Canada, a total of 750 lightly armed soldiers. They set up a small command center in Srebrenica proper (Bravo Company Compound) and a main compound in the town of Potočari, located five kilometers north, on the road to Bratunac.

The Bosniak population in the enclave maintained its own defenses, even though the establishment of the “safe area” had also entailed a demilitarization agreement, dated May 8, 1993, between Bosnian Army general Halilovic and Bosnian Serb general Ratko Mladic. The agreement stipulated that “any military operation [was] strictly forbidden” (Honig 1996:131).²¹ Within the enclave, under the command of Naser Oric, there were three or four brigades of the Bosnian Army’s 28th Division, with an estimated 1,500 active soldiers.²² Their munitions included light weapons, machine guns, anti-tank weapons, and light mortars, and it was rumored that the enclave received arms shipments periodically from clandestine helicopter runs.

With security increased for the humanitarian convoys, conditions improved inside the enclave, despite its relative isolation from the rest of the country’s Bosniak-controlled territory.²³ Over the course of the next fourteen months, life for the estimated 40,000 people living in



FIGURE 1. Graffiti on the wall of the Dutchbat soldiers' compound in Potočari. Photo by the author.

the enclave remained relatively stable as the threat of NATO air strikes and the presence of the UNPROFOR troops kept the surrounding Bosnian Serbs forces in check. On March 3, 1994, a Dutch battalion of 570 soldiers relieved the Canadian UNPROFOR unit. Frustrated by Oric's troops' disregard for the demilitarization agreement and by the dismal conditions within the enclave, many of the Dutch viewed the refugee population with skepticism or even outright contempt.²⁴ Some of the soldiers' graffiti in the UN barracks at the Potočari compound still remain on the walls. Written in green marker, the following words reveal at least one soldier's caustic, derogatory depiction of the female Bosnian population: "No teeth . . . ?/A mustache . . . ?/Smel [*sic*] like shit . . . ?/Bosnian girl!"²⁵

In their account of the genocide, Jan Willem Honig and Norbert Both write, "To many of the Dutch soldiers' eyes the refugees did not offer an edifying spectacle. The enclave was overpopulated. People were underfed and badly clothed. Hygiene was a problem. . . . Some Dutch were shocked by the eagerness with which Muslims would await the dumping of rubbish on the tip outside the compound in order to scan it for useable items or food. . . . Many soldiers spoke in disparaging

terms of the Muslims” (1996:131). Honig and Both leave off without interrogating these impressions, for example, the lack of basic food supplies for the Bosniak population.²⁶ Their characterization of the Western European soldiers’ relations with the refugees hints at some of the frustrations and biases at play well before the enclave came under attack in the summer of 1995.²⁷ Reminiscent of the fear, suspicion, and even disgust that displaced persons encountered after their liberation from Nazi concentration camps, the atmosphere in the enclave between the refugees and the UN soldiers was tense, often marked by mutual distrust.²⁸ For some Dutch soldiers, conditions of squalor and acts of desperation rendered the refugee population less, rather than more, pitiable. The graffiti on the walls of the army barracks and reports of Dutchbat soldiers’ disgust with the Bosniak population reveal a level of indifference present not only among some of the very soldiers charged with protecting the civilians within the safe area, but also among the UN bureaucrats in the Zagreb and New York offices. As Michael Barnett argues in his analysis of the failed UN peacekeeping effort in Rwanda, the production of such indifference is closely tied to the bureaucratization of peacekeeping, a tragically unsuccessful UN endeavor during the early to mid-1990s. Just as members of the secretariat reportedly dismissed concern over UNAMIR troops as “not our boys” in the Rwandan case (Barnett 1997:559), so some among the Dutch troops had drawn subtle, culturally based lines between themselves and the Bosniaks of the enclave. “The identity of the bureaucracy . . . represents the emotional and cognitive mechanisms for producing exclusion and apathy” (Barnett 1997:563).²⁹ Although in constant contact with the refugees, even the strong arm of the bureaucracy was not immune to the numbing effects of indifference.

THE FALL OF SREBRENICA

In April 1995, for reasons unclear at the time and that many would later find dubious, Naser Oric was recalled to Tuzla, leaving a power vacuum in the Bosniaks military leadership. By June 1995, the situation in the enclave had changed significantly. The effects of a command issued by Karadžić in March, entitled “Directive 7,” began to appear: it called for the creation of “an unbearable situation of total insecurity with no hope of further survival or life for the inhabitants of Srebrenica” (ICTY Prosecutor v. Radislav Krstić 2001, par. 28). Following several days of skirmishes between Bosnian Serb and Bosniak forces, the Bosnian Serbs

defied UN Security Council Resolution 819 in early June by capturing two Dutchbat observation posts along the southeastern perimeter of the enclave. The action triggered an exodus of 3,000 to 4,000 refugees from that area toward the city of Srebrenica.

In a newspaper column, Mirsad Mustafic condemned the Dutch soldiers' ineffectual defense: "The Dutch 'warriors' did not resist them at all and in a gentlemanly fashion gave up this industrial zone and the communication route of Banja Bašta-Skelani-Milici-Vlasenica to Karadžić's chetniks. The Dutch weren't bound by handcuffs like their colleagues in Pale because the Serbs were more than sure that the American 'phantoms' wouldn't be bombing" (2003:110).³⁰ By now the Dutchbat troops numbered only 429, half infantry and half medical and support troops.³¹ On July 6, the Dutchbat observation posts in the southeastern part of the enclave received direct fire from a range of Bosnian Serb weaponry, including mortars, artillery, and tanks. Rather than returning fire, Dutchbat commander Tom Karremans, decided to surrender the posts. One after another, over the course of the next several days, the UN positions fell to the advancing Serbs. Unclear as to the local Bosnian Serb commanders' intentions, the Dutch commanders requested air surveillance to assess the position and movement of Serb troops. A debate arose over what Bosnian Serb general Ratko Mladic was planning—either to seize the southern portion of the enclave or to attack and take control of the entire safe area.

By July 9, Bosnian Serb forces began to attack the city itself from the southern entrance of Zeleni Jadar. The Bosnian Army's defenses succeeded in repelling the thrust of the advance, but the Dutch were indecisive and ill prepared to take on the new threat posed by the Bosnian Serb Army. "The problem was the UN Security Council Resolution 836, which defined the UN's mandate in the safe areas. France demanded that air strikes be used to defend the safe area. Heeding the advice of Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Colin Powell, the Clinton administration insisted that NATO airpower should be used only to defend UN peacekeepers" (Rohde 1997:78). Out of this distinction emerged two options: air strikes, which entailed NATO's large-scale bombing of a wide area around Srebrenica in response to Serb attacks, or Close Air Support, which would allow NATO planes to target only specific, individual pieces of artillery or tanks. Weighing these options, General Cees Nicolai, the UN chief of staff, decided against air strikes and in favor of Close Air Support. He then devised a plan that would force the Serbs to show their hand. They would be given an ultimatum: if they

attacked a specific position—a blocking position that the Dutchbat would assume within the city of Srebrenica—the UN would order the NATO Close Air Support. Nicolai outlined the plan to Colonel Karremans, who later claimed to have understood the warning given by Nicolai to mean that if the Serbs did not withdraw, they would face massive air strikes.

Almir Bašović's play *Priviđenja iz srebrenog vijeka* (Ghosts from the Silver Age) became one of Bosnia's most poignant artistic critiques of the Dutchbat's—and by extension the international community's—failure to protect Srebrenica. In one of the final scenes of the play, a family discusses the growing threat of the Serbs' full-scale attack on the enclave. The father has faith that as a UN "safe area," the enclave will be protected:

Father: How was it on the guard?

Son: This morning some chetnik raids were observed around the UNPROFOR observation points.

Father: That's nothing. If it were something serious, they would warn us from Sarajevo.

Son: God, old man, how will they warn you from Sarajevo about what's happening right in front of your own nose?

Fatima [mother]: My fear is that they'll betray us.

Father: Who?

(Pause)

Fatima: These foreigners. The blue helmets. They're hungry. I heard that people don't go digging through their garbage anymore because it's not worth it. How are they going to defend us when they're hungry? Besides, what does Srebrenica mean to them? They don't even know how to pronounce it.

Father: What is it, what is it? A safe area, that's what it is. They have to defend us. They signed on it.

Son: Yeah, they did. And they even sealed it. If we hadn't returned Morillon to them when he set out to flee on foot, they would have signed with the devil.

Father: It's just the way things have to be. We are now property of the United Nations. That means property of the entire world.

Son: Hungry, lice-infested. . . . It'll come out whom we belong to. Better yet, recommend to your guys in the City Hall that they ban even riding a bicycle around

the square with the name General Morillon on it. He liked to go on foot.

Father: Leave off about the general. He was as good as could be expected. Now they have to defend us. If it's necessary, even with airplanes.

(Pause)

Father: They have satellites. They can read a newspaper on the ground with those things.

Son: Where around here can you find a newspaper?

Father: Come on, stop kidding around. I'm just saying that they have all kinds of scientific wonders.

Son: Stop. My god, the wonder is this bread of Fatima's. Mom, where on earth did you get this flour?
(Bašovic 2003)

Through this dialogue, Bašovic underscores the division of opinion among the residents of the enclave. The mother, Fatima, speaks of an ominous sign—the Dutchbat soldiers' hunger—and questions whether they will defend the refugees if they themselves are suffering. Moreover, she points out their abiding indifference: “they don't even know how to pronounce it.” The young university-schooled son is deeply skeptical of the UN's promises, and he mocks his father and the enclave's civilian leadership for their blind faith. Morillon's promises, he reminds his father, were made under duress: the man tried to escape the enclave in the dead of night “on foot” rather than face the nearly hysterical crowd. The father, on the other hand, believes in that promise, in the international community's responsibility for Srebrenica's security. Furthermore, he believes in the power of their sophisticated technology, their “scientific wonders.” Science, more precisely awe-inspiring scientific invention, is a synonym throughout the play for the paradoxical coupling of the so-called advancement of civilization with the development of new technologies of violence. The Western governments' satellite images and high-precision bombs could have stopped the advancing Serbs. Like the father in the play, many of the enclave's residents thought the UN would act in their defense. Others were convinced that the enclave was being sacrificed by the UN, by the Bosnian Army, or by President Alija Izetbegovic in a land swap with the Bosnian Serbs.

For its own part, the Bosnian Army command within the enclave had relied upon the UN's informal and formal promises of protection—from Morillon's pledge to the language of UN Security Council Resolution

836. Honig writes cynically, “The Bosnians had also concentrated on a risky strategy. Rather than fight themselves, they believed their best chance of defending the enclave [was] with forcing the UN to intervene on their behalf” (1996:180). Yet by not responding to the Serb attacks, the Bosniaks were following instructions from both Sarajevo and the UN troops not to engage. With one piece of weaponry, a Yugoslav Army M-48 field artillery gun that had a range of three miles, the Bosniaks could have disabled infantry and, with a direct hit, even taken out Serb tanks. On July 9, a Dutch soldier spotted the gun and warned the Bosniaks guarding the weaponry not to fire it. If they fired, NATO would not strike, he explained to them. A Bosniak soldier replied that NATO would not strike, but for a very different reason: the Serbs held thirty Dutch troops prisoner and the lives of those Dutch soldiers were more important than the lives of the 30,000 Bosniaks in the enclave (Rohde 1997:67–69).

By 8:55 A.M. the next morning, July 10, Colonel Karremans had filed his third—and still unheeded—request for Close Air Support. The UN headquarters in Sarajevo had balked because the Dutch could not say with 100 percent certainty that the Serbs had fired on their blocking position. By 10:30 A.M., there were forty planes circling above the Adriatic Sea (only six of which could execute strikes), waiting for the command to head toward Srebrenica. At the meeting in UN headquarters at Zagreb later that morning, General Bernard Janvier, force commander, expressed his suspicion that the Bosnian Army (the Bosnian Muslim defense in Srebrenica) was trying to draw the UN into a conflict. Yasushi Akashi, civilian head of the UN mission, agreed: “‘The BH [Army] initiates actions,’ he said, ‘and then calls on the UN and international community to respond and take care of their faulty judgment’” (Rohde 1997:102). Akashi’s distrust of the Bosniak forces in the enclave supports what Barnett sees as a shift in the UN’s approach to its peacekeeping missions during that period. Whereas previously “the Security Council and the Secretariat routinely noted that they had a responsibility to help those who could not help themselves, they were now suggesting that they could only help those who were willing to help themselves. . . . By and large, ‘the people’ no longer meant the victims of violence but those who controlled the means of violence” (1997:569).

With clear evidence that Serbs, not the Muslims, had fired on the Dutch blocking position, Karremans sent his fourth request for Close Air Support at 7:15 P.M. By 7:50 P.M., back in Zagreb, the UN officials

were debating the logistics of a nighttime strike. Notoriously indecisive, Janvier prolonged the discussion, consulting over the phone with Akashi, as well as with the Bosnian Serb general Zdravko Tolimir, who only one day before had denied the attack was even taking place. “As the discussion dragged on, a waiter in a red blazer began serving canapés and pouring red wine for each participant. The UN officers and officials had missed their dinner and Janvier or one of his staff had ordered refreshments. As Srebrenica’s fate hung in the balance, Janvier’s Crisis Action Team sipped wine and nibbled on gourmet sandwiches” (Rohde 1997:124). At last they came to a decision. Janvier agreed to night strikes; back in Srebrenica, however, Karremans opted against it, thinking it better to wait until the next morning. At 12:05 A.M., July 11, Karremans met with the civilian leaders in the enclave’s post office. He assured them that if the Serbs did not withdraw, there would be massive strikes. “‘This area,’ Karremans said, pointing at the wide swath of territory now held by the Serbs south of Srebrenica, ‘will be a zone of death in the morning. NATO planes will destroy everything that moves’” (Rohde 1997:132). Those present at that meeting could not possibly have fathomed the tragic irony of his words. For indeed, beginning the next day, Srebrenica would become a “zone of death”—but not the kind of death and destruction Karremans, his troops, or any of the UN officials debating Srebrenica’s fate had imagined.

Survivors of the genocide described to me how they peered up at the sky on the morning of July 11, and how they listened for the sound of the NATO planes. With each passing hour their panic grew, and the exodus began. People hastily packed up what they could carry, food and clothing for the next few days, and set off for the Dutch compound in Potočari. In the play *Priviđenja iz srebrenog vijeka*, the protagonist, Fatima, who survived the fall but lost both her husband and her son, moves from scene to scene pushing a wheelbarrow. I asked one of the Women of Srebrenica why this was significant, and she told me that wheelbarrows were the only functional “vehicle” in the enclave. When it came time to flee, some people placed their ailing or elderly relatives in wheelbarrows and pushed them the five kilometers to Potočari.

The story of the NATO planes that never arrived the morning of July 11 is a pathetic lesson in UN bureaucracy and, in particular, UN military bureaucracy. Expecting the aircraft to arrive at 7 A.M., the Dutch troops were prepared to guide the air strikes against the Serb positions south of the city. With no sign of the planes, at 8 A.M. the Dutch sent another request to Tuzla for air attacks. In the meantime,

the Bosniak troops had followed Karremans's instruction to keep clear of the target area and thus had abandoned strategic strongholds. The Serbs were clearly preparing to attack the city, and at 9 A.M., still no planes appeared on the horizon. The Dutch called over to Tuzla to find out what was holding up the air attacks. A Pakistani colonel, chief of air operations in Tuzla, explained that they had filed the wrong form—that is, a form for air strikes rather than the form for Close Air Support. They needed to file the correct form and attach updated targets. The comedy of errors continued as the Tuzla command forwarded the now correct form to Sarajevo, but was required to resend it twice because it had not included the proper listing of targets. Delaying the request even further, apparently the Tuzla command center's secure fax was disabled for several minutes. By 10:45 A.M., Sarajevo had the complete and correct form for Close Air Strikes, but because of yet another miscommunication, the NATO planes that had been waiting over the Adriatic since 6 A.M. were sent back to refuel at 9 A.M. They would not be ready for another two hours. The request, originating from Srebrenica at 8 A.M., traveled from Tuzla to Sarajevo and then finally to Zagreb; General Janvier signed it at 12:05 P.M. and Akashi at 12:15 P.M. At the earliest, a new "package" of NATO planes would arrive at the enclave at 1:45 P.M. By then, the Bosnian Serbs had entered the city. Two NATO planes, F-16s from the Royal Dutch Air Force, arrived at 2:40 P.M.—having been in the area for twenty minutes but unable to make radio contact—and dropped a total of two bombs before flying off. Only one tank seemed to have been damaged in the strike, and no Serb soldiers were injured or killed because they had already left their vehicles and were in the city itself. Fifteen minutes later two American planes arrived in eastern Bosnia, but they failed to see the smoke flares lit by Dutch commando air controllers and so returned to base without dropping a single bomb. Finally, an A-10 heavy ground-attack aircraft was poised to strike, but the Bosnian Serbs issued an ultimatum: should the air strikes continue, they would kill the Dutch soldiers in their custody and shell the enclave—soldiers and refugees alike. The strikes were immediately called off (Honig 1996:25–26; Rohde 1997:137–162).³²

Video footage exists of the Bosnian Serbs' entrance into the city. It records General Mladic and his troops as they walk through Srebrenica's streets. He directs a subordinate to remove a street sign and orders his troops, "On to Potočari." He turns to the camera for an interview by Serbian television journalist Zoran Petrovic: "Here we are in Srebrenica on July 11, 1995. On the eve of yet another great

Serbian holiday . . . We present this city to the Serbian people as a gift. Finally, after the rebellion of the Dahijas, the time has come to take revenge on the Turks in this region” (Rohde 1997:167).³³ Except for Mladic’s entourage of soldiers, the city looks like a ghost town. This footage, recorded to document the Bosnian Serb military victory over not only the Bosniak defenses but also the United Nations’ will and capability to defend their so-called safe haven, ironically now serves as evidence against the victors. The prosecution used it in the Krstic case because General Krstic appears with Mladic walking through the city. No doubt it will also be used against Mladic and Karadžić, should they ever appear before the ICTY at The Hague.

The Bosniaks had already fled the city, taking one of two routes. An estimated 15,000 Bosniak men and boys gathered in the villages of Jaglici and Šušnjari, located in the northwestern part of the enclave, where they prepared for the 50-kilometer trek through Serb-controlled land to free territory, specifically to the city of Tuzla. Fearing that they would be killed if they fell into the hands of the Bosnian Serb forces, the men felt they stood a better chance of survival if they tried to escape through the woods. They organized themselves according to brigades. At the head of the column were units of the 28th Division, followed next by civilians mixed with soldiers, and finally by the last section of the column, made up of the Independent Battalion of the 28th Division (ICTY Prosecutor v. Radislav Krstic 2001, par. 61). Approximately one third of the column was soldiers, but not all of them were armed. Because the men had to make their way through Serb minefields located at the periphery of the enclave, they were forced at points to walk in single file, forming a long column that spread out over miles. The last of the units left Šušnjari midday on July 12, twelve hours after the first men had set out (United Nations 1999, pt. vii, sec. F, par. 316). The other refugees—the women, children, elderly, and sick or injured—fled to Potočari, where they sought refuge at the Dutchbat compound. By early evening, the Dutch had allowed 4,000 to 5,000 refugees inside the perimeter, having cut a hole in the fence surrounding the enclosure. Eventually they decided there was not enough space to accommodate more, and blocked the entrance, leaving 15,000 to 20,000 people outside the compound in the adjacent buildings, parking lots, fields, and abandoned buses. Water was scarce, and there were no latrines. The summer heat only exacerbated the rapidly deteriorating conditions, as well as the exhaustion and panic felt by the refugees.

DEPORTATION AND KILLINGS

With the fall of the enclave to the Bosnian Serb forces, General Mladic summoned Colonel Karremans to appear at the first of three meetings to take place over the next fourteen hours. At 8:00 P.M., flanked by a few of his officers, Karremans met Mladic and the Bosnian Serb Army delegation at the Hotel Fontana in Bratunac, where Mladic spent the better of forty-five minutes berating the Dutch commander for the NATO strikes (United Nations 1999, pt. vii, sec. F, par. 313). From Mladic's remarks, it appeared that at that time, he did not know the whereabouts of the 28th Division. They agreed on a second meeting later that evening, to which Karremans was to bring representatives from the refugee population.

At 11:30 P.M., the negotiations recommenced at the Hotel Fontana. This time Karremans was accompanied by the director of the Srebrenica high school, Nesib Mandžić, the sole civilian representative, who had been "plucked from the crowd in Potočari" (ICTY Prosecutor v. Radislav Krstić 2001, par. 128). The Serbs set an intimidating tone: the screams of a pig being slaughtered just outside the window interrupted the initial discussion, and shortly thereafter, Mladic set a broken sign from Srebrenica's city hall on the table. The Dutchbat leader tried to impress upon Mladic the plight of the refugees as well as the condition of the 100 wounded housed within the compound. Mladic in turn outlined his plan to transport the refugees out of the enclave, explaining that vehicles would be provided, but insisted that the Bosnian Army turn over all their weapons. If they did not, he would shell the Dutchbat compound. The two men agreed to a ceasefire until 10 A.M. the next morning, at which time Mladic, Karremans, and refugee representatives—people who could, in Mladic's terms, "secure the surrender of weapons and save [the] people of Srebrenica from destruction"—would meet for a final time (ICTY Prosecutor v. Radislav Krstić 2001, par. 130). Mladic asked for Naser Oric but was told that he had not been seen in the enclave since April. The meeting was videotaped; it captured Karremans and his fellow officers raising their glasses in a toast to Mladic's victory. "Although Karremans later explained that he had only been holding a glass of water, the effect of the images was to portray the UN and the Dutch army as legitimators of ethnic cleansing. The pictures have become a symbol of the UN's humiliation in Srebrenica" (Honig 1996:31).

The third and final meeting took place the next morning at 10 A.M.

between Karremans, a delegation of three Bosniak civilian representatives (school director Mandžić, businessman Ibro Nuhanović, and economist Camila Omanović), Mladić, and other Bosnian Serb Army officers. Again in command of the meeting, which was also being videotaped, Mladić set out the choice that the refugee representatives should relay to the enclave's population: "You can either survive [*opstati*] or disappear [*nestati*]. . . . For your survival, I request: that all your armed men who attacked and committed crimes—and many did—against our people, hand over their weapons to the Army of the Republika Srpska. . . . On handing over weapons you may . . . choose to stay in the territory . . . or, if it suits you, go where you want. The wish of every individual will be observed, no matter how many of you there are" (ICTY Prosecutor v. Radislav Krstić 2001, par. 132; Bosnian words added).

As Karadžić had done during his remarks to the Bosnian Parliament back in 1992, Mladić explicitly mentioned the disappearance of the Bosniak population, in this case, the Bosniaks in the Srebrenica enclave. The notion of disappearing began to take on a more ominous meaning in light of his subsequent instructions. Mladić explained that all men of military age (which he specified as between seventeen and seventy) would be separated and screened for "war criminals."³⁴ Given the impossibility of disarming the men in the column who had already embarked on the trek through the forest (about whose activity and location Mladić was now aware), the refugee representatives were powerless to do Mladić's bidding. Thus, to survive, they and the rest of the refugees gathered at the UN compound had no choice but to leave the enclave. The Dutch and the Bosnian Serb officers then discussed the logistics of the refugees' transport. The Bosnian Serb Army would provide buses for all the refugees who "wished" to leave for Kladanj. Mladić asked Karremans to provide diesel for the transportation, but Karremans responded that he did not have the fuel. Finally, the Dutch commander requested that a Dutch soldier accompany each bus to oversee its proper transport to free territory. Mladić agreed to this request, and they determined that the evacuation would begin at 1:00 P.M. that day.

The so-called voluntary evacuation—in reality a forced expulsion—took place over the course of the next two days. By noon July 12, trucks and buses began arriving at the Dutch compound. Terrified by the sporadic shelling and the sight of houses set afire in the adjacent hills by the Bosnian Serb forces around the compound, people

were clamoring to get on the buses. At the same time that the vehicles appeared, Bosnian Serb soldiers entered Potočari and began to walk among the refugees. Mladic himself made an appearance, again accompanied by the Serbian television journalist Petrovic, as well as other media representatives. He oversaw the filming of his soldiers as they handed out loaves of bread and water to the refugees and candy to the children. In the now famous footage, women, children, and old men stand behind the thin strip of red-and-white tape separating them from the Serb soldiers—a pitiable symbol of the protection offered the panicked refugees. Mladic approaches them, gives a child an avuncular pat on his head, and tells the crowd, “Don’t be afraid. Just take it easy, easy. Let women and children go first. Plenty of buses will come. We will transfer you towards Kladanj. From there you will cross to the territory controlled by Alija’s [Izetbegovic] forces. Just don’t panic. Let women and children go first. Do not let any of the children get lost. Don’t be afraid. Nobody will harm you” (United Nations 1999, pt. viii, sec. A, par. 322).

As soon as the video cameras stopped filming and the deportation began, the Bosnian Serbs began to show their true intentions. Quickly sidelining the Dutch soldiers as they tried to assist the refugees during the deportation procedures, the Bosnian Serbs asserted their control over the crowd. They dropped the façade adopted for the cameras and began hurling insults and hitting the refugees struggling to board the buses. They formed a column through which the refugees had to pass as they approached the convoy of vehicles. There they separated men and boys from the women and children, forcing the women onto the buses and the men to the left, toward what became known as the “white house,” a residential property that stood immediately across the road from the Dutch compound. Mothers clung to their young sons even as the Serb soldiers wrested them from their grip. The men were forced to leave their belongings, including their identity cards, in a pile in the yard outside before entering the white house.

In contrast to the refugees’ growing panic and the chaotic atmosphere that had descended over the compound, the Bosnian Serb forces appeared well prepared for their specific roles within a highly coordinated campaign. As a Dutch soldier later testified, “Everybody had been assigned a task, everybody knew his position. . . . It was indeed well organized” (ICTY Prosecutor v. Radislav Krstic 2001, par. 155). The troops were a collection of different military and paramilitary forces, each with its own commander. There were units from the Drina

Corps, including the Zvornik Brigade and the Bratunac Brigade, as well as paramilitary forces such as the Drina Wolves and irregular Serb forces, including members of Arkan's Tigers and the now infamous special police unit, the Scorpions. For their part, the Dutch troops displayed mixed reactions. Some attempted to intervene on the refugees' behalf, insisting on following the evacuation plan drawn up in Bratunac, whereby they were to accompany the convoys, and, in some cases, trying to gain the release of boys who looked too young or men who looked too old for the so-called screening. Others took part in the evacuation passively, standing aside as the Bosnian Serbs assumed control of the procedure. Bosniak witnesses later spoke of how some Dutch even assisted in the separation of men from women and children.

Throughout the afternoon and into the evening, the refugees continued to pack themselves onto the buses. Hours later they arrived at Tišca, where Bosnian Serb soldiers forced them to disembark and walk six kilometers to the Bosniak-controlled territory near Klandanj. Some wounded and elderly crawled on their hands and knees to safety. Of the ten locally recruited female staff members of *Médicins Sans Frontières*, three were held back by Bosnian Serb soldiers at Tišca. Apparently they were looking for Naser Oric's sister. Two were allowed to leave after an hour and a half of interrogation; the third, a nineteen-year-old nurse, returned several hours later after having been raped by the Serb interrogators. Military-age Bosniak men who had somehow managed to board the deportation buses were removed from the vehicles during stops along the journey or were separated and taken away when they arrived at Tišca. Back in Potočari, the white house rapidly filled with men, whose faces, according to the Dutch soldiers allowed to visit them briefly, registered sheer terror. The Bosnian Serbs held others in additional locations, such as near the zinc processing factory, and began loading them into trucks and driving them to detention sites in Bratunac.

By the evening of July 12, the Serbs had become even more aggressive in their persecution of the crowd around the compound. They picked out men, some of whom returned and others of whom were never seen again. They dragged off women as well. Two Bosnian Serbs raped a young woman in full view of several refugees, who were paralyzed by fear for their own lives, as other Serb soldiers stood by. Throughout the night screams, moans, and sporadic gunshots were heard, and by morning rumors abounded of killings and corpses being found in the proximity of the compound. As the next round of deportation buses arrived, people were desperate to leave.

During the initial twenty-four hours after the fall of the enclave, the international community struggled to respond to the unfolding debacle. On July 12, in Zagreb at the UN daily briefing, Akashi and Janvier defended the decision not to resist the Bosnian Serb takeover of the enclave. Ever concerned for his bureaucracy's reputation, Akashi recognized the potential public relations disaster and reportedly remarked, "It would help if we had some TV pictures showing the Dutch feeding refugees" (Rohde 1997:194). The Serbs, along with Petrovic's camera crew, however, had already beaten them to it. The United Nations Security Council in New York convened for an emergency session, during which members drafted Resolution 1004, demanding that "the Bosnian Serb forces cease their offensive and withdraw from the safe area of Srebrenica immediately" (United Nations 1999, pt. viii, sec. B, par. 329). During the debate the representative of the Czech Republic warned against the failure to act, arguing that "if today we have adopted just another resolution full of demands that will not be underpinned by our determination to see them fulfilled, then we will be doing more harm than good, not only to the situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina but also to the position of the Security Council. The Bosnian Serbs will be reaffirmed in their belief that Security Council resolutions are just paper tigers. They will be tempted to repeat what they did in Srebrenica in Žepa, Goražde and other so-called safe areas, knowing that they can do so with impunity" (United Nations 1999, pt. viii, sec. B, par. 338). Caught in this crisis of the bureaucrat's "dual identity" (Barnett 1997:563), the representatives of the member states fretted not only about the fate of the Bosniaks in the enclave, but also the fate of the Security Council as a credible institution.

While the separation of men and boys and the deportations were taking place at Potočari, the men and boys in the column that had started out from Šušnjari came under attack. They made their way through the woods along a route parallel to the road running between Bratunac and Konjevic Polje. At Konjevic Polje the column had to cross over an asphalt road, leaving the cover of the forest. There the Bosnian Serb forces launched their most intense attacks and succeeded in cutting the column in two. Only a third of the Bosniak men made it across, while the others doubled back into the woods.

By the afternoon of 12 July 1995, or the early evening hours at the latest, the Bosnian Serb forces were capturing large numbers of these men in the rear. Witnesses reported a variety of techniques used to trap prisoners. In some places, ambushes were set up and, in others, the Bosnian

Serbs shouted into the forest, urging the men to surrender and promising that the Geneva Conventions would be complied with. In some places, Bosnian Serb forces fired into the woods with anti-aircraft guns and other weapons or used stolen UN equipment to deceive the Bosnian Muslim men into believing that the UN or the Red Cross were present to monitor the treatment accorded to them upon capture. In fact, Bosnian Serb forces stripped the captured Muslim men of their personal belongings and, in some cases, carried out random summary executions. (ICTY Prosecutor 2001 v. Radislav Krstic, par. 63)

An estimated 6,000 men from the column were captured along various points on the Bratunac–Konjevic Polje road on July 13. On that day, some 1,000 to 4,000 Bosniak captives were held in the Sandici Meadow, and an additional 1,000 to 3,000 men were detained in a soccer field in Nova Kasaba, which ; the UN buses passed right by on their way to Tišća.³⁵ Several of the deportees recalled seeing there hundreds of men kneeling with their hands tied behind their backs. The Dutch soldiers accompanying the deportation convoys later confirmed having seen the captives in the field.³⁶ The Bosnian Serb forces proceeded to move the men to various locations. From the Sandici Meadow, some traveled by bus or were forced to walk to a warehouse in the nearby village of Kravica. The remainder of the Sandici Meadow captives, in addition to the Nova Kasaba detainees, were loaded into buses and trucks and transported to Bratunac or other sites. General Mladic appeared at many of these detention locations over the course of the next several hours, promising the captives food and water, reassuring them of their imminent reunion with their families, or explaining that they would soon be exchanged for Bosnian Serb prisoners.

After passing yet another harrowing night in and around the Dutchbat compound in Potočari, the remaining refugees from the enclave departed on the last of the buses for Tišća at 8:00 P.M. on July 13. The deportation concluded with the refugees who had taken shelter within the compound itself. Fearing for the safety of male members of that group, the Dutch compiled a list of the Bosniak men among their ranks between the ages of seventeen and sixty-five. Intended to document the individuals taken into custody by the Bosnian Serb Army—de facto prisoners of war—the list recorded the names of 239 men. Major Robert Franken promised the men and their families that he would show a copy of the list to the Bosnian Serbs, telling them he had already faxed it to The Netherlands and Geneva; in case the Bosnian Serbs confiscated the list, he would smuggle another copy in his underwear. He

hoped that the knowledge of this official record, submitted to international authorities, would prevent the Bosnian Serb forces from harming the men as known captives. As it turned out, however, none of them made it to Tuzla; they were last seen leaving the compound on that day. A tiny fraction of the refugee population within the compound was granted safe passage because they were employees of the Dutchbat or other international organizations working in the enclave. Although this group was to be limited to employees only, some family members of these workers managed to gain shelter with the UN troops.³⁷

The men whom the Bosnian Serbs had separated at Potočari, approximately 300 from within the compound and 600 to 900 from outside the Dutchbat gates, had been transferred to various locations in Bratunac: an old school, a warehouse, a soccer field, and the buses and trucks used for their transport. By now the Dutch knew that some of the men separated at Potočari had been killed and that none of them had arrived at Tišća, where the Bosnian Army and aid workers met the women and children. Even as white house detainees were being deported from Potočari, they begged the Dutch for help. One officer testified at The Hague, “They were crying, you know, men—you can imagine men crying in front of you and seeking assistance from you, assistance which you cannot give—it had gone beyond my control” (ICTY Prosecutor v. Radislav Krstic 2001, par. 159). Furthermore, the Dutch soldiers knew that Mladic’s insistence on screening the men for war criminals was merely a pretense.³⁸ The Bosnian Serb forces had stripped the men of their personal effects, including their identity cards, just outside the white house. “In the absence of personal documentation, these men could no longer be accurately identified” (ICTY Prosecutor v. Radislav Krstic 2001, par. 160).³⁹ After all the Bosniaks had departed from the compound, the Bosnian Serbs proceeded to burn their personal effects. At Bratunac the Potočari detainees were joined by thousands of men captured from the column (such as from Sandici Meadow and Nova Kasaba). The Bosnian Serbs did not keep these groups separate, again revealing that they had no intention of carrying out any legitimate screening procedures.

Over the course of the next five days, the Bosnian Serb forces executed and buried an estimated 7,000 to 8,000 Bosniak men from the enclave.⁴⁰ Some were killed individually, others in small groups, but the majority were “slaughtered in carefully orchestrated mass executions,” which began on July 13 just north of Srebrenica (ICTY Prosecutor v. Radislav Krstic 2001, par. 67). Those who survived the first night of

killings and detention were transported to execution sites north of Bratunac. The same buses and trucks used to deport the women and children now served as convoys for the men about to be slaughtered. From July 14 to July 17, Bosnian Serb forces executed the men en masse at various locations in the Bratunac and Zvornik regions.

Most of the mass executions followed a well-established pattern. The men were first taken to empty schools or warehouses. After being detained there for some hours, they were loaded onto buses and trucks and taken to another site for execution. Usually, the execution fields were in isolated locations. The prisoners were unarmed and, in many cases, steps had been taken to minimize resistance, such as blindfolding them, binding their wrists behind their backs with ligatures or removing their shoes. Once at the killing fields, the men were taken off the trucks in small groups, lined up and shot. Those who survived the initial round of gunfire were individually shot with an extra round, though sometimes only after they had been left to suffer for a time. Immediately afterwards, and sometimes even during the executions, earth moving equipment arrived and the bodies were buried, either in the spot where they killed or in another nearby location. (ICTY Prosecutor v. Radislav Krstic 2001, par. 68)

The judgment in the trial of Bosnian Serb general Radislav Krstic details the major execution sites as well as the burial locations connected to those sites (ICTY Prosecutor v. Radislav Krstic 2001, par. 201–253):⁴¹

- Cerska Valley (afternoon, July 13, 1995): The first of the large-scale executions occurred near Cerska along the road between Konjevic Polje and Nova Kasaba. A mass grave was later found to the southwest of that road, from which 150 bodies were exhumed. Ligatures still bound the arms of the victims behind their backs.
- Kravica Warehouse (late afternoon, July 13, 1995): Bosnian Serb forces killed an estimated 1,000 to 1,500 men captured in the Sandici Meadow and transported to the warehouse in Kravica. Survivors testified that the Bosnian Serbs threw grenades and shot directly into the warehouse, packed with the Bosniak prisoners. ICTY investigators examined the site on September 30, 1996, and observed the “presence of bullet strikes, explosive residue, bullet and shell cases, as well as human blood, bones, and tissue adhering to the walls and floors of the building” (par. 208). Three gravesites are linked to the Kravica warehouse executions: two primary mass graves, Glogova 1 (at least 191 bodies recovered) and Glogova 2 (at least 139 bodies), and a secondary mass grave, Zeleni Jadar 5 (at least 145 bodies), which was linked to Glogova 2.
- Tišća (July 13–14, 1995): Bosniak men who had managed to board the buses deporting women and children were separated upon arrival at Tišća. Bosnian Serb soldiers took these men to a nearby school,

after which they transported twenty-two men to a remote location and shot them.

- Grbavci School Detention Site and Orahovac Execution Site (July 14, 1995): A convoy of thirty buses transported 1,000 (though perhaps as many as 2,000–2,500) detainees from Bratunac to the Grbavci School in Orahovac on the morning of July 14. After spending several hours in the packed and sweltering confines of the school, the men were taken in trucks to nearby fields, lined up, and shot. Heavy machinery dug the graves even as people were being executed. Two primary mass graves were exhumed in that area, Lazete 1 (containing the remains of 130 individuals) and Lazete 2 (containing the remains of 243 individuals). Investigators found hundreds of blindfolds at each site. Bodies from both Lazete 1 and Lazete 2 were dug up and transferred to the secondary mass graves of Hodžici Road 3, 4, and 5, which collectively contained the remains of 184 individuals.
- Petkovci School Detention Site and Petkovci Dam (July 14–15, 1995): Approximately 1,500 to 2,000 detainees were transported from Bratunac to the Petkovci School on the afternoon of July 14. As at the Grbavci School, the men suffered for several hours in the crowded space of the school without food or water. During the night their captors called the prisoners out in small groups, ordering them to strip to the waist and remove their shoes. Their hands were tied behind their backs. They were then transported by truck to a field near the Petkovci Dam, where they were lined up and shot. ICTY personnel “exhumed a gravesite at the Petkovci Dam between 15 and 25 April 1998. Experts determined that this gravesite had been ‘robbed,’ using a mechanical excavator that resulted in ‘grossly disarticulated body parts’ throughout the grave” (par. 229). This primary grave contained at least 43 individuals. It is also linked to a secondary mass grave, Lipje 2, which contained at least 191 individuals.
- Pilica School Detention Site and Branjevo Military Farm (July 14–16, 1995): Between 1,000 and 2,000 detainees were transported from Bratunac to the village of Pilica, north of Zvornik. They were held at the Pilica School under deplorable conditions (no food, water, or latrines) for two nights. Some men died of dehydration during this period of captivity. On July 16, Bosnian Serbs called men out from the school in small groups, tied their hands behind their backs, and loaded them onto trucks. They were driven to the Branjevo Military Farm, where they were lined up in groups of ten and shot. “Sometimes the executioners were particularly cruel. When some of the soldiers recognized acquaintances from Srebrenica, they beat and humiliated them before killing them” (par. 234). Heavy machinery dug a grave while the executions were still taking place. The primary mass grave, known as the Pilica (or Branjevo Military Farm) gravesite, contained the remains of 13 individuals. A secondary mass grave, Čančari Road 12, contained the remains of 174 individuals. Ligatures and blindfolds were found at both sites.

- Kozluk: Approximately 500 prisoners were taken to the Kozluk site, located between the Petkovci Dam and the Branjevo Military Farm, where they were killed by an execution squad. The prisoners were forced to sing Serb songs while they were being driven to the site. The primary mass grave at Kozluk contained the remains of at least 340 individuals. It is linked to a secondary grave, Čančari Road 3.

In addition to forensic analyses of physical evidence such as soil, shell casings, and wheel tracks, aerial photographs taken by satellites slightly before, during, and after the period of July 13 to July 17 documented the presence of bodies and vehicles at many of the execution sites listed above, as well as the disturbance of earth associated with the initial digging and filling of the mass graves. These satellite images also provided evidence that Bosnian Serb forces attempted to conceal the primary mass graves during early autumn of 1995 by digging up and removing some or all of the bodies contained within them to a second location—hence the term “secondary mass gravesite.” ICTY investigators estimated that “it would have taken at least two full nights and several trucks to move the bodies to the secondary gravesites,” given that the longest distance between primary and secondary mass graves was 40 kilometers (ICTY Prosecutor v. Radislav Krstic 2001, par. 261).

In the late evening of July 16 and early morning of July 17, as the last of the Bosniak prisoners were being executed in locations such as Pilica and Kozluk, the column of men who journeyed through the forest broke through to free territory. Approximately 4,500 to 6,000 men had survived the 50-kilometer trek over six days, encountering intense attacks from Bosnian Serb forces along the way. Although Tuzla’s 2nd Corps (Bosnian Army) did not launch any diversions to assist the incoming column, Naser Oric organized a band of volunteer soldiers that succeeded in weakening the Bosnian Serb lines enough to allow the men from the column to cross into the free territory near Sapna. An estimated 2,000 of the 10,000 to 15,000 men in the column had died during combat with the Bosnian Serb Army or when crossing over landmines. An unknown number of men had committed suicide in the forest. Approximately 6,000 of them had surrendered or been captured and were later executed at the sites listed above.

THE AFTERMATH

The men who survived the trek immediately began searching for their own families among the women and children who had arrived at

Tišca on July 12 and 13. Of the 19,700 deportees registered with the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC, or Red Cross) by July 15, 5,670 took refuge at Dubrave, the airport outside of Tuzla, where a sprawling camp of white tents had been erected.⁴² The Bosnian government struggled to provide accommodations for an additional 11,000 people. Many others found private housing among relatives and friends in the Tuzla area. Their arrival marked the start of the long and trying relationship between the displaced from Srebrenica (the refugees from the Podrinje region) and the Tuzla Canton—both its government and the local population.

The Dutchbat unit remained in Potočari at the UN compound until July 21, continuing to serve as Mladic's bargaining chip with the international community. On July 15, the Bosnian Serb general met in Belgrade with Serbian president Slobodan Milošević, EU mediator Carl Bildt, and UNPROFOR commander Lieutenant-General Rupert Smith. They negotiated the release of fifty-five Dutch soldiers being held hostage and agreed to the July 21 departure for the rest of the troops in Potočari. Mladic approved ICRC's request to access the Bosniak detainees. He promptly reneged on this pledge, blocking their attempts to reach the Bosniak prisoners—hundreds, if not thousands of whom were still alive at that point in time. In a final act of hubris, Mladic insisted that UNPROFOR compensate the Bosnian Serb Army for the fuel expended during the deportation of the Bosniaks from Potočari. Although Lieutenant-General Smith refused at the meeting, later that day the Dutch troops handed over 30,000 liters of fuel to the Bosnian Serbs in Bratunac (Honig 1996:45).

When the Dutch troops did finally depart from Potočari on July 21, they traveled to Zagreb, Croatia. There on the afternoon of the following day, after having received a "heroes' welcome" by Crown Prince Willem Alexander of The Netherlands, Defense Minister Joris Voorhoeve, and other top military officials, they celebrated the end of the mission. "A party, complete with a forty-two-piece brass band playing Glenn Miller songs, cases of beer and drunken Dutch soldiers dancing in a chorus line, was thrown that afternoon" (Rohde 1997:325). Video footage of the party and the drunken soldiers appears in the BBC documentary, *Cry from the Grave*. On the heels of the stark images of the refugees and captured men earlier in the film, their exuberance and laughter is painful to watch. In *Prividenja iz srebrenog vijeka*, Almir Bašović (2003) parodies the Dutchbat soldiers' callous and self-indulgent celebration in a scene entitled "Potochari Party":⁴³

Music. UNPROFOR soldiers enter. They dance.

Lieutenant: Good evening, welcome to the Potočari party. Here, with a little luck we finally got some trucks with the necessary beer and cigarettes. I invite the Major to come up before us and officially open this party.

Major Frank: Thank you, lieutenant. So, Mladic outplayed us. But don't get upset about it because our honorable mission is drawing to an end. In the name of that, all those here are invited to join us in our modest celebration. Cheers!

(The lieutenant pulls Major Frank off to the side. He speaks to him confidentially.)

Lieutenant: Major, Sir, the translator, Hasan, claims that civilian observers saw bodies around the camp. What will happen to the people whom we threw outside?

Major Frank: Tell Hasan that his job is to translate and not to cause panic in the camp. Those are lies and rumors! I received a promise from General Mladic that nothing's going to happen to anyone. (He takes a sip.) Except for, of course, those who committed crimes. These people haven't had a taste of beer for two months. Don't let him spoil our party.

(Major Frank shoves a beer into the lieutenant's hand. As the party goes on, the soldiers start to take off their clothes. When they are standing in their underpants and undershirts the party quiets down and the light goes off . . .)

I attended the play on three separate occasions, twice in Sarajevo and once in Srebrenica, when the cast performed it free of charge at the city's cultural center on July 11, 2004, after the commemoration and mass burial of 282 identified persons at the memorial center in Potočari. It is uncomfortable to watch the party scene, especially in the presence of survivors of the genocide: the two Dutch soldiers gyrate to the sound of a pop song, taking swigs of beer and belting out the lyrics into the microphone. The character of Major Frank and the reference to Hasan remind the audience that the theatrical performance refers directly to painfully true stories. Major Franken had pledged to send the list of 239 Bosniak men whom the Dutch had turned over to the Bosnian Serbs to Holland and Geneva. Instead, on July 22, he submitted it to UN officials in Zagreb, who passed it along to the Red Cross. When given the opportunity in Zagreb to alert the world of what they had seen and what they suspected, Colonel Karremans and Major Franken chose instead to leave the storytelling to a handful of Dutchbat soldiers who

had agreed to meet with reporters. Karremans read a short statement that failed to mention the beatings, rapes, and known executions (nine bodies found outside the compound, photographed by Dutch soldiers) at Potočari; the scene at Nova Kasaba and reports of gunshots nearby; the “Muslim hunting” incident, and the list of the 239 missing men.⁴⁴ Only in September, after the Dutchbat soldiers had returned from a month-long leave (during which time they were instructed not to speak to media representatives) did the Ministry of Defense initiate debriefing procedures. Rohde concludes, “In hindsight, the Dutch failure to speak out after they left the enclave was worse than their conduct during the Serb offensive” (1997:336).

Like tiles in a mosaic, the testimonies of the handful of Bosniak men who survived the executions, the men in the column, the deportees, and the Dutchbat soldiers slowly slid into place, and a picture of the Bosnian Serb capture of the enclave and disposal of its inhabitants became clear. The offensive and the ensuing violence had followed a well-orchestrated plan. Srebrenica’s genocide was not a wanton act of violence, but a carefully crafted and executed operation whose success in part arose from the lack of planning and political will on the part of the very institution that had pledged to “deter” attacks on the so-called safe area. Given that in the Podrinje region buses and fuel were scarce, the Bosnian Serb Army’s capacity to procure both and transport the entire population of refugees at the Dutchbat compound—an estimated 25,000 people—within a 48-hour period suggests that the operation must have been planned several days in advance (ICTY Prosecutor v. Radislav Krstic 2001, par. 140). The Bosnian Serb forces carried out mass executions of more than 7,000 men over the course of the following five days, digging mass graves to dispose of the bodies. The efficiency with which they accomplished the deportation and genocide revealed another aspect of the planning: outside troops—“efficient and experienced ‘ethnic cleaners’”—were brought in and worked together with local police and militia (Honig and Both 1996:30). Moreover, the Bosnian Serbs’ ability to occupy the enclave and then assume control of the situation at Potočari points to the strategic reduction of resistance from both the Dutch soldiers and the refugees. “The Dutch were intimidated by token aggression, but at the same time they were told that they would not be harmed if they cooperated. The Muslims were initially reassured by the distribution of some food and water and by promises that they would soon be free to go . . . but they were also subjected to outbursts of indiscriminate violence. Fearful and confused, both groups

largely played into the hands of the Serbs” (Honig and Both 1996:30). In addition to reducing the refugees’ resistance by offering morsels of food and reassuring words, some of the Bosnian Serb forces turned the aegis of UN protection on its head by using its promise of security to bait the men in the column. They stole vehicles and donned the peacekeepers’ blue helmets and uniforms, using the age-old treachery of battle in which enemies pretend to be comrades.

The news of the genocide and the disgrace of the UN peacekeeping mission in Srebrenica finally began to affect the Western governments’ political will. On August 10, in a closed session of the UN Security Council, US secretary of state Madeleine Albright showed CIA satellite photographs of the area of Novo Kasaba. The before and after shots of men lined up and subsequent mounds of freshly moved earth provided persuasive evidence that mass executions had taken place. President Clinton set aside the embargo policy and committed to the use of force in Bosnia. On August 30, 1995, NATO bombing began, and in three weeks its planes had flown 3,400 sorties and carried out 750 attacks against 56 targets. “They called the mission Operation Deliberate Force, as if to announce up front that what might have been called ‘Operation Halfhearted Force’ was a thing of the past” (Power 2002:440). By November, the bombs had succeeded in forcing the Bosnian Serbs to the negotiating table, and the Dayton Peace Agreement, reached in November 1995 and signed on December 14, 1995, officially ended the war. By establishing two entities—the Bosniak and Croat-controlled Federation and the Bosnian Serb-controlled Republika Srpska (RS)—the peace settlement divided Bosnia and Herzegovina among its three ethnic groups. The Serbs (31 percent of the population) received 49 percent of the land; the Croats (25 percent of the population) got 25 percent, and the Bosniaks (44 percent of the population) got the other 25 percent. The once predominantly Bosniak town of Srebrenica now lay in the Serb-controlled Republika Srpska.

IDENTITY

When reading through the accounts of life in the enclave and the fall of Srebrenica, I am continually struck by the fundamental misreadings and manipulations of identity that lie at the heart of the loss of so many lives. Virulent nationalist rhetoric cast Bosniak refugees in the enclave as “Turks,” whose expulsion from eastern Bosnia would avenge past injustices against the Serbian people. Morillon’s UN flag became an

empty promise of protection as the Dutchbat soldiers and their superiors in Zagreb and New York hesitated, paralyzed by their skepticism and mistrust of the enclave's population. More concerned about their own institution's reputation than the lives of thousands of Srebrenica's refugees, officials like Janvier and Akashi hid behind the language and protocols of the world's largest bureaucracy rather than face a crisis of UNPROFOR hostages. And when the air strikes never materialized, blue helmets and UN flak jackets tricked desperate men into surrendering. Finally, with the cameras rolling, General Mladic presented a façade of benevolence to the outside world only to turn around and direct the wholesale slaughter of thousands of prisoners of war.

The Bosnian Serb forces went beyond misreading and manipulating identity; they sought to annihilate it. They systematically eliminated the Bosniak presence from the enclave by expelling and executing its residents; then they dug up, moved, and reburied the remains, both to hide their work and to create the illusion that their victims had never existed. In an interview in his office, Amor Mašovic, the head of the Federation Commission for Missing Persons, outlined the three ways the Bosnian Serbs deprived their captives of their individual identity:

So through the recovery, the exhumation, the identification, the autopsy of the Srebrenica victims, it points to the fact that—I say this very often—the criminals took or snatched from them or stripped them of their identity. The first time they stripped them of their identity was when they took them prisoner, detained them, and when they took away from them what they had on themselves . . . their identity cards and passports and all those identity documents which could have testified to the first and last name of the victim. When they took away watches, when they took off their ring on which it is written their wedding day, which is also a strong identification document, perhaps even stronger than an identity card. If there's a wedding ring which bears February 21, 1965, that is a stronger document than an identity card. Why? An identity card can be my brother's or my father's or my son's, but a wedding ring on my finger is exclusively mine. For sure I didn't take the wedding ring from my son or my father and put it on my own finger. Therefore, at that point they stripped them of their identity, when they took the documents away from them while they were still living.

They stripped many of them of their identity when they buried them with heavy machinery in mass graves, not separating body from body as would be expected. Even war goes according to rules, right? Even war. They kill people, people die, but after that the people they killed they bury in a civilized manner, one beside the other, and not in the manner in which Karadžić, Mladic, and the forces in Srebrenica did, burying them, throwing them away. That is the second deprivation of identity.

Finally, the third time when they took away their identity was when they came and removed them from the primary graves, tore up their bodies, and carried them off to secondary graves. And thus today we have the situation where we have the body of one man [found] in three different places which are kilometers and kilometers apart from one another. So those are the fundamental difficulties.

In explaining this three-step process by which the Bosnian Serbs destroyed their victims' identity, Mašovic directs our attention to the social relations that form and bind together individual lives. The act of removing a wedding ring erases the material emblem of those ties, but traces of individual identity nevertheless endure. Bodies exhumed from mass and surface graves become a text to be read, yielding up clues that reconnect an individual to his web of social ties, to his family. Thus, it remains for people like Mašovic, the forensic experts tasked with recovering and identifying the Srebrenica missing, to help surviving families reclaim what the Bosnian Serb forces sought so relentlessly to obliterate.