

# Presentation of "Souvenir Srebrenica"

Roberta Biagiarelli

Good afternoon Ladies and Gentlemen.

I would like first of all to thank the Greens/EFA for inviting me here today to bear witness to the Genocide of Srebrenica on the occasion of its anniversary that will be celebrated tomorrow at the Potocari Memorial with the burial, this year, of 450 bodies that have been exhumed from mass graves and identified. I would like to thank you all and to apologise in advance for my faulty English pronunciation.

Before talking to you about the documentary "Souvenir Srebrenica" that we are going to watch in ten minutes, I need to briefly explain to you the reasons behind my decision to get to know so closely Srebrenica over the last ten years.

In Italy I work as a theatre artisan and since 1988 I have been performing a monologue titled "A come Srebrenica" (A for Srebrenica), which is an accurate reconstruction of the three-year siege of the city and of the causes that eventually led to the final massacre that, as you know, occurred in July 1995.

On the occasion of the tenth anniversary of the Genocide (in 2005) I decided to turn my theatrical text into a documentary movie, or better said, to develop it by giving the chance to the people that ten years after the massacre managed to come back home in Srebrenica, to tell their story.

It is a historical, social, anthropological and mostly "human" survey of those places that has been going on for ten years and that has grown so intense that I often can not see the boundary that separates my sentimental belonging to Srebrenica from my professional point of view on this city.

The idea of the documentary already came to my mind in 2003 and finally, after a number of efforts, in the spring of 2005 I managed to bring together a group of people to work with me on the documentary project.

In July 2005 we moved to Srebrenica and we lived there for one month during which we collected direct evidence from many citizens. Due to editing reasons, we unfortunately had to make a selection of their declarations.

We were present to the Commemoration of July 11<sup>th</sup>, 2005 and we also found material, most of which unpublished, in different archives in Sarajevo and Belgrade as well as amateur videoletters from the siege of Srebrenica.

When editing, we added some images provided to us by the Aja International Court, a part of the video shot by the Scorpions, provided by Natasha Candic and some parts of my theatre performance filmed in July 2005 at the Potocari Battery Factory that during the siege was the headquarters of the Canadian and Dutch blue helmets and one of the scenes of the most savage ethnic cleansing.

The process of making the film was long and exhausting and it is not over yet for me but I can say it was worth the effort for my professional growth but most of all because I was personally enriched by this experience.

Today I am authorized to speak on behalf of the Association of the "Mothers of Srebrenica" and "Women of Srebrenica". I am constantly in touch with them and I spoke to some of these women last Sunday.

There can be no illusion of democracy without justice.

Events like Srebrenica do not happen by chance.

The horror of Srebrenica does not only lie in death, but also in the fact that people sought shelter there to survive and Europe, that is us, guaranteed them that they would survive.

That war was a great swindle to keep things as they were so that everyone could keep doing their business in the Yugoslavian territory and beyond.

Twelve years after the end of the war, in Bosnia there are still one million refugees. There are extremely serious socio-economic problems just round our corner. And there is a difficult past to manage too, which means facing war crimes. The Balkans is us, they concern us and it will be pointless to take shelter in memory repression because those problems will keep knocking on our door, they are already coming back...

It is rather ambitious to think about a reconciliation process in that area today. The only way to move forward is the longer and more exhausting road that leads to the elaboration of the conflict to try and reconstruct a common memory. Before getting to talk about a State-Nation there are at least one thousand more urgent problems to deal with.

I hope that present European States can start focusing on the situation in the West-Balkan area and to think about it free of stereotypes and regardless of ethnic differences.

The Dayton agreements have actually created and ratified a situation that is practically out of control in those areas.

I know you have the power and the means to act, everyone according to his own competence but please make concrete actions.

The women of Srebrenica, people living there are tired and demotivated by the immobilism which permeates the city.

They are clamouring for concrete actions.

Keeping memory alive does not only mean remembering and honouring the victims, the dead; it means most of all acting, taking care of the living ones, those who remain.

This is also the deepest meaning of my job.

Working with those who survived to help them rework what happened, come to terms with the past to be able to look ahead.

In the documentary you will listen to the testimonies of Muslims and Serbs living in Srebrenica and you will see that they can exactly overlap.

Everyone tells his own truth: the truth of citizens that have been deceived by the great swindle of the economic power that makes war and leads it.

We will never be able to call ourselves "Europe" if this West-Balkans black hole keeps existing in the European Geography of which Bosnia is the beating heart, the belly, the place which once stood out as an example of tolerance and melting-pot of peoples and religions.

I would like to conclude my speech with the words of a Bosnian friend of mine who now lives and works in Rome, Elvira Mujcic, aged 27. She was born in

Srebrenica where she fled from together with her mother Nadja, her grandmother and two little brothers on April 16, 1992. Her father and other male members of her family are reported missing so far. In one of her letters she writes: "Soon it will be July 11th. Someone will remember the Anniversary. The 'observers' only remember it when the day arrives, the day when our dead can be a piece of news. All the other days they are not. All the other days our dead are ours alone..."

July 11<sup>th</sup> is the day of collective grief, the day when the images broadcast on some TV news show the faces of many people gathered together to bury the bones found over the year. Individual grief is there all the other days of the year, when the cameras are off".

Well, I wish that this passage from individual grief to collective grief could take place over the time, so that grief can be shared and possibly made easier to bear.

I will be back in Srebrenica with Elvira Mujic and a staff of other people from August 27<sup>th</sup> to September 1<sup>st</sup> 2007 thanks to the initiative International Cooperation for Memory organized by Langer Foundation of Bolzano and the Association Tuzlanska Amica of Tuzla in the framework of a larger project called "ADOPT SREBRENICA".

The week will be devoted to the intercultural dialogue and to the promotion of a culture of peace and living together, to the creation of a historical memory that can be shared, open to the participation of people and representative institutions, scholars, researchers, journalists, students, in the prospect of creating in Srebrenica an International Research Centre for the analysis, prevention and management of conflicts.

To adopt actually means to always accept as your own.

It means to stop for a while and to really think about the needs of the local population that are:

Doing justice, becoming neighbours again, having a job and money enough to buy food and other goods, besides the possibility to nourish one's own spirit and soul, once the present emergency is finally over.

As for me, I will start a research project titled "Festivity Time" whose objective is to collect oral memories of festivities and holidays, not only religious, that people used to share before the conflict, that will hopefully be published and become a theatre performance.

My craft is to tell stories through places and getting to know the people that live in those places. Theatre is an ancient and simple instrument, even if in Italy it has become a hard thing to do. It is a sharp instrument too that allows to probe worlds that seem to be too far away.

My duty as a European citizen is to give back dignity to the extraordinary people I had the luck to meet during these ten years of work and to be available for giving voice to the victims.

To us the Balkans are a great occasion, an access key to the Near East, to prevent extremism from sprouting wings in a situation of fragility and political instability

I wonder why the post-war monuments are worldwide dedicated to men. Men are those who make war, they are the warriors that empty out houses, that leave ruins behind them.

Women are those who remain, they fill up the houses again, just like a hermit crab slipping into an abandoned shell. They are the ones that try to re-build life, they give back a meaning to places ensuring their continuity; they are the controllers and sentinels of life and memory. But most of all, in the case of the Balkans, once the nationalistic hangover is finally over, women remind us that there is more than this, that identity is not in lineage and descent but in scents, in colours, in the sound of places, in the sweet belonging to the music of a language, to the water, to the trees, to the stones of bridges. And that we are inevitably condemned to each other.

THANK YOU FOR YOUR ATTENTION.