

SREBRENICA IS DUTCH HISTORY

“The function of a commemoration ceremony is to restore one common representation of the world after it (usually by a horrifying event) has been destroyed?”

- Frank Meester and Coen Simon in Herdenken herdacht: Een essay om te vergeten by Simon(e) van Saarloos.

What happened in Srebrenica?

On July 11, 2020 it will be exactly 25 years since the genocide in Srebrenica took place. It was the largest genocide in Europe since World War II. After the fall of the ‘safe enclave’ Srebrenica on July 11, 1995 Bosnian Serb military troops and Serbian paramilitaries murdered in days 8,372 Bosnian Muslim men and underage boys. The murdered men and boys were not soldiers, but ordinary civilians, such as residents of the town of Srebrenica and others who during the war had taken refuge in this United Nations-proclaimed “safe” area. This area was supposed to be secured by the Dutch UN Battalion Dutchbat. Dutchbat, however, failed to provide this protection, resulting in many men and boys seeking safety by fleeing into the mountains after the fall of the Muslim enclave. With the help of Dutchbat, the remaining men were separated from women, children and the elderly. In what happened next (Bosnian-) Serbian soldiers deported 25,000 women, children and the elderly to other areas, and systematically executed the men and boys.

Little attention to this dark page in Dutch history

The Srebrenica genocide is undeniably a dark page in the Dutch history that connects Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Netherlands and their citizens. This connection is tangible in the fact that Dutch Bosnians who have survived the war in Bosnia Herzegovina, Dutchbat soldiers and responsible politicians as well as their successors are still struggling with the processing of the war, and more specifically the consequences of the failure regarding Srebrenica. Yet this collective history does not get the attention it is due. As a result, the collective awareness of the Srebrenica genocide remains behind in the Netherlands.

Genocide denial

Denial is the final stage of genocide. The denial of the Srebrenica genocide immediately afterwards, began by secretly burying the bodies of the more than 8,000 murdered Bosnian Muslim men and boys in various mass graves. This process of denial was continued & strengthened by the displacement of the bodies of the victims and reburial in secondary mass graves. By doing so, (Bosnian-)Serbian soldiers endeavored to hide the genocide from the world. Nevertheless, in the meantime the remains of more than 7,000 bodies have been excavated and identified and most of the victims had a decent funeral at the Potočari Memorial Center.



Commemoration of the Srebrenica genocide on the Plein in The Hague

The International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia and International Court of Justice have confirmed that genocide took place in Srebrenica. Despite legal consensus and overwhelming evidence that the genocide took place, various tendencies of denial in recent years are becoming increasingly visible and influential not only in the Balkans but also on an international level. Denial has a spectrum of forms: from combatting the actual number of genocide victims and their identity, revisionism of historical narratives about victimization and perpetratorship, up to the glorification of (Bosnian)Serb war criminals. As long as denial continues, the genocide still exists.

Dutch responsibility in recognition and commemoration of the Srebrenica genocide

To counter a systemic denial of the Srebrenica genocide, as well to realize a meaningful processing of the genocide, structural recognition and commemoration is necessary. Given the Dutch involvement in this history, the Netherlands has an important responsibility. To achieve this, the collective Bosnian Girl launched the campaign *Srebrenica is Dutch history*.



Dutchbat in Potočari in July 1995. Photo: AP

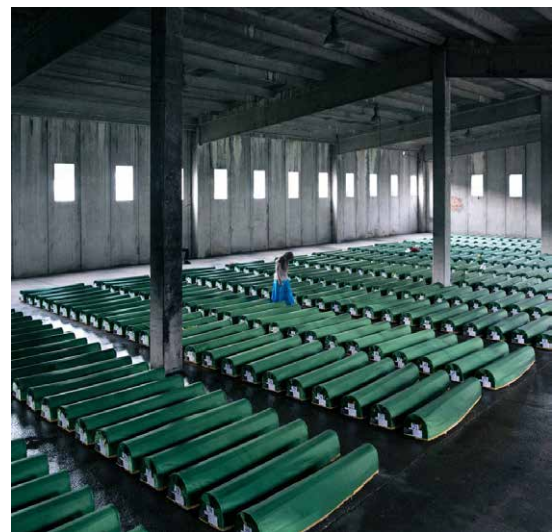


Photo: Ziyah Gafić

The campaign

Srebrenica is Dutch history is a campaign with which we demand attention for the Srebrenica genocide, the role of the Netherlands and its 25th anniversary in the Netherlands. The main objective of the campaign is promoting collective awareness and reflection on the Srebrenica genocide. With this we want to mobilize involved political and social actors to anchor awareness and reflection on this history in various public domains of Dutch society.

The campaign aims to achieve three concrete goals that help with that structural anchoring:

1. Dutch history and social education gives more attention to the Srebrenica genocide and is taught in an inclusive manner. The publication of the recently updated Dutch canon is taken as an opportunity to develop a solid and updated digital basis for the chapter on Srebrenica. For this purpose, conversations are held with relatives of the victims and organizations that have been working for years on gaining their recognition.
2. The creation of a permanent national monument in The Hague where all citizens can commemorate.
3. Structural government funding for the annual commemoration of the Srebrenica genocide in the Netherlands.

To achieve these three goals, we address the following political and social actors:

1. Publishers of history teaching methods, teachers of history and social studies, teacher training courses in history (as well as the Dutch National Consultation for History Education), the Association of History and State Governance Teachers in the Netherlands, professional committees of history and social studies, curriculum experts,

primary and secondary school administrators, humanities and law faculties, organizations that are able to provide additionally relevant (lesson) material on the subject (eg NIOD, the Dutch institute for war documentation), and the commission in charge of revising the Dutch Historical Canon.

2. The City council and the bench of Mayor and Aldermen of The Hague.
3. The House of Representatives and the Cabinet.

The campaign consists of a temporary monument on the Plein in The Hague which is to be opened on July 11, 2020 and will remain there for three weeks, an online photo series and a short campaign video that can be shared via social media and an educational website with articles and documentaries.

The online commemoration has extra value due to the measures taken with regards to the corona pandemic, because of which the physical commemoration can only take place in a minimized form this year. For that reason, we are building a website and two social media platforms (Facebook and Instagram) that will make the temporary monument accessible to everyone at home. In this manner, collective commemoration will still be possible.

A temporary monument; an (online) photo series of 25 Bosnian Dutch from 25 years old

This year, we commemorate the genocide with a photo series consisting of 25 portrait photos of Bosnian Dutch women and men of 25 years old, made by top photographer Robin de Puy. The young women and men did not (consciously) experience the war, but their double identity symbolizes the interconnectedness of Dutch and Bosnian history. Their presence in Dutch society emphasizes the importance of joint narration and commemoration of the Srebrenica genocide. They embody both a divided past as a shared future.



25 portrait photos

From July 11, 2020, the 25 photos will be set in large format on the Plein for three weeks in a circle. Within the circle the physical commemoration - through corona measures - will take place in minimized form. The persons portrayed keep the memory of the 8,372 murdered Muslim men and boys alive and form a protective circle around the commemorating relatives of the victims, survivors of the war in all of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Dutchbat soldiers and others involved. On the outside of the circle, the title *Srebrenica is Dutch history* will be placed in continuous form, without beginning and end, so that the words will catch the attention of passers-by who in first instance would not dwell upon the commemoration.



Design of the installation with 25 portrait photos of Bosnian Dutch women and men on the Plein

The 25 photographs will also be published as an online photo series. In addition, filmmaker and *Bosnian Girl* collective member Ena Sendijarević will make a short campaign film. The photos and campaign film are primarily to be seen on the website www.srebrenicaisnederlandsegeschiedenis.nl and can be further shared from there, eg via social media. To facilitate this, the accounts *Srebrenica is Dutch history* are also created on Facebook and Instagram. The online presentation of the photographs simultaneously forms both a commemoration of the victims and a demand for structural attention for the genocide in Srebrenica within the Dutch community.



Video still from the short campaign video

The website www.srebrenicaisnederlandsegeschiedenis.nl

Besides a prominent place for the digital temporary monument - the photo series - and the short campaign film, the website will be a platform where contextual information can be found regarding the fall and genocide of Srebrenica, the role of the Netherlands and the war in former Yugoslavia in general. Likewise, the website offers resources that provide problem analyses and endorse the importance of the objectives of our campaign. This information is provided from different angles and through various disciplines, with special attention for artistic expressions. Specifically, this information is provided in the form of existing documentaries and short films (in collaboration with IDFA and Eastern Neighbors Film Festival), podcasts and relevant studies and articles. The website is therefore a hub of existing sources of information.

The website also collects various initiatives around the 25-year-old Srebrenica commemoration. The website thus offers an extra stage to interest groups that have been raising attention with regards to the genocide in Srebrenica over the past years. During the establishment of the temporary monument and the construction of the website, we closely collaborate with various organizations that have a long track record when it comes to anchoring the Srebrenica genocide in Dutch society: the preparatory committee of the Srebrenica commemoration that has been organizing the national commemoration on the Plein since 1997 in The Hague, peace organization PAX that has been committed to finding truth and justice regarding Srebrenica over the past 25 years and the editorial staff of Argos who since 1995 have been researching whether the genocide could have been prevented.

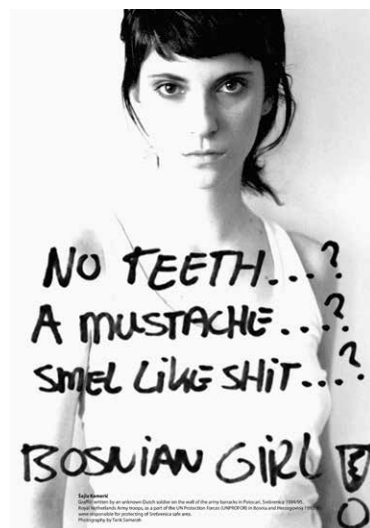
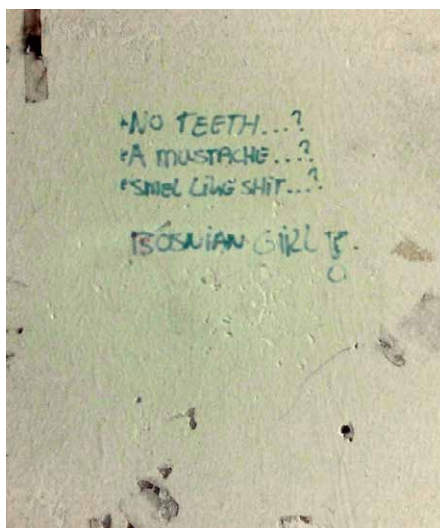
Finally, visitors can sign a petition via the website with which they can declare that they endorse the three objectives of the collective and call the responsible actors to action. The website will be launched on July 3, 2020 and will continue to stay online after the commemoration, until our goals have been fulfilled.

Bosnian Girl

Bosnian Girl is a collective consisting of four Bosnian Dutch women - Arna Mačkić, Daria Bukvić, Emina Ćerimović and Ena Sendijarević - with backgrounds in respectively architecture, theater, research & policy and cinema. We commit ourselves individually through our work for a more inclusive Netherlands with a bold vision of community. We joined forces to reach an inclusive narrative and commemoration of the Srebrenica genocide in the Netherlands.

More than 1,000 bodies of those murdered in Srebrenica are still missing, but their humanity lives on in all who commemorate. We believe in dignity and solidarity of all people, regardless of their background and stand for a society in which violence no longer has to be a condition. It is our belief that an inclusive and structural commemoration of large-scale and systematic violence from the past and their victims are an essential part of such a form of community. It contributes to a world in peace wherein human dignity is essential, while genocide denial is a breeding ground for future violence.

Collectively commemorating a traumatic history serves as an important lesson that can prevent such a history from repeating itself. Preventing recurrence of the past can only happen when all groups concerned are involved at a commemoration. Only then will meaningful reconciliation be possible, which is necessary to break with the continuation of past violence (Duraković 2005). Or, like Jean-René Ruez, lead war crimes investigator at the International Criminal Tribunal for former Yugoslavia, aptly stated in the documentary *A Cry from the Grave*: “[Srebrenica] is a crime against humanity and a crime against humanity is a crime committed against every single one of us.”



De graffiti tekst in Potočari en het kunstwerk *Bosnian Girl* door de Bosnische kunstenares Šejla Kamerić

The name of the collective refers to the internationally renowned artwork *Bosnian Girl* by the Bosnian artist Šejla Kamerić, whose artwork inspired the development of the photo series of *Srebrenica is Dutch history*. On the artwork you can see a photo of herself, taken by photographer Tarik Samarah, with over it a graffiti text written by an unknown Dutchbat soldier on the wall of the barracks in the UN base in Potočari where Dutch soldiers were stationed. "No teeth...? A mustache...? Smell like shit...? BOSNIAN GIRL!" The impact of the artwork is enormous. Its provocative nature has sparked much debate.

Genocide can only take place where there is dehumanization of 'the other'. Not only have many human lives been deprived in Srebrenica, it is also the place where the dignity of these people and their relatives has been taken away. Victims and survivors were reduced to their Islamic background and humiliated by Muslim hatred, starved, stripped of hearth and home and murdered. The insulting text that has been written by the unknown Dutch soldier and the genocide that followed show that someone who dehumanizes "the other" - in this case the Bosnian woman and her community - in a racist manner cannot protect his fellow man.

The artwork *Bosnian Girl* has given humanity a face, precisely where attempts have been made to eliminate humanity.



Emina Ćerimović, Ena Sendijarević, Arna Mačkić en Daria Bukvić

Emina Ćerimović (Slovenj Gradec, 1987) works as a policy officer at the Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment on the theme of a resilient democratic constitutional state and society and its relationship to integration issues related to migrant communities. Previously, Emina was involved in the Scientific Council for Government Policy, where she researched the need for more variations within the European Union to guarantee the future of the Union. The discrepancy between the wars and crimes that resulted from the disintegration of her native country of former Yugoslavia, and the promise of the 'never again' slogan on which the EU is built, developed a fascination for the soft power of the EU. Especially in relationship for inter-ethnic reconciliation in the Western Balkans. Emina strives for a society in which radical equality and justice are central, believing that the fundamental principles of the rule of law form a sound common foundation.

Ena Sendijarević (Odžak, 1987) is a screenwriter and film director. She made a name for herself with the short films *TRAVELERS IN THE NIGHT*, *FERNWEH* and *IMPORT*, the last of which premiered at the Cannes film festival in 2016 and the Dutch short film submission for the Oscars was. In 2019, Ena's first feature film *TAKE ME SOMEWHERE NICE* premiered in the Tiger competition of the IFFR, where the film received the Special Jury Award for Outstanding Artistic Achievement. The film was subsequently shown at many international festivals, including Cannes Film Festival and Sarajevo Film Festival, where the film was awarded the Grand Prix. In the same year, Ena was elected Volkskrant direction talent of the year. Ena's next feature is expected in 2021.

Arna Mačkić (Čapljina, 1988) is an architect. With her architectural firm Studio LA Arna looks for social themes (public domain, mechanisms of in- and exclusion, refugees and identity), and reflects this in design, word and writing. She creates new forms of public domain, which stimulate encounters and a collective identity without disguising differences and history. Her book *Mortal Cities & Forgotten Monuments* was named the best architecture book 2016 by the Guardian and in 2017 Arna won the Young Maaskant Prize for her search for inclusive architecture and new forms of public domain.

Daria Bukvić (Tuzla, 1989) is a director and writer. She is a director of The Dutch National Theatre and her own Foundation Daria Bukvić. Bukvić made three performances who finished in the jury selection of the Dutch Theater Festival as one of the eleven most interesting performances of that year: *Nobody Home* (2015), *Melk & Dates* (2019) and *Othello* (2020). Bukvić received a Silver Cricket, the Van Praag Encouragement Prize and the Amsterdam Prize for Art for her committed theater work. In 2018, Harper's Bazaar voted her as one of their 14 'Women of the Year'.