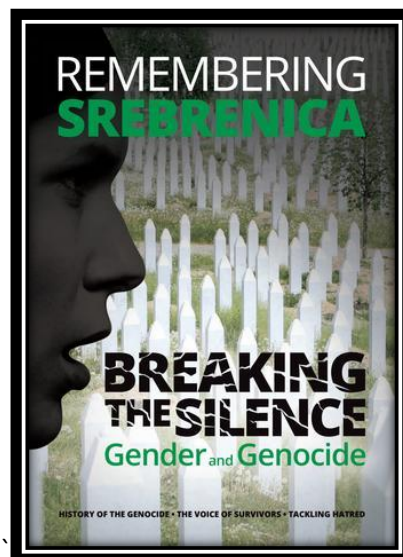


Breaking the silence: Gender and genocide. Showcasing the work of Remembering Srebrenica.

Part of the Stitched Voices exhibition, sponsored by the International Development Department

University of Birmingham

By looking at the documentary *'Breaking the silence: gender and genocide'*, we were able to approach visually some of the connections between gender, violence and peacebuilding through an observation of narratives of women who had survived episodes of sexual violence as well as the horrors linked to the 1995 Srebrenica genocide in Bosnia-Herzegovina. As the event's date (November 22nd, 2017) coincided with the ICTY's verdict against General Ratko Mladić for genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity in Bosnia-Herzegovina, there was already a context stimulating debate on the delicate and emotional issues surrounding genocide and its impact on gender and peacebuilding efforts.



The session started with a visual encounter with what could be described as stereotypical images of women and genocide, of the powerlessness of victims and the lack of agency embedded in pictures of women in Srebrenica, which all stimulated a critical debate on how women, victims and survivors are usually represented in photography. As the audience presented their initial assumptions and concerns with these images, various themes began to emerge: different perceptions between men and women of violence, the changing roles of men and women during times of war, and the dilemmas that constitute a process of empowering women, victims and survivors as active agents in processes of peacebuilding.

As the expectations were set, soon the audience were able to appreciate the work of Remembering Srebrenica by watching a video kindly recorded by Amra Mujkanović, a representative of the organization. The video focused on two dimensions: one telling the story of Srebrenica as a way of understanding violence in conflict as well as its impact on women survivors of war, and another centred on how Remembering Srebrenica, uses memorialization of the Bosnian war as a way to raise, in the United Kingdom, awareness of the importance of fighting intolerance, racism and xenophobia within society. Her presentation served as a unique and valuable introduction to the work done in 'Breaking the Silence'.

Once the introduction helped set the stage for a critical, visual approach to genocide and gender, the session moved into an analysis of the film. The audience was exposed to the narratives of women who have decided to openly speak about the horrors of war, of having experienced sexual violence and the importance it had for them to find a channel that could make their voices be heard. The panel of commentators could not be more appropriate for the occasion: Dr. Christalla Yakinthou (University of Birmingham), Dr. Jelena Obradović-Wochnik (Aston University) and PhD Researcher Kate Schenck (University of Birmingham). The comments made in this expert panel touched upon a wide range of issues: the problems of overcoming victimization and the need to empower women in peacebuilding, the challenges and opportunities arising from difficult conversations about rape and sexual violence, of the ethical dilemmas involving researchers when studying emotional and traumatic phenomena such as genocidal violence and of how sometimes telling certain narratives can often obscure others that do not have the same capacity of outreach.



This expert panel was followed by various comments and questions from the audience who were interested in topics such as the difficult ethical choices when researching and working with sensitive and traumatic topics, the need for reflexivity and awareness of the political implications of studying gender, genocide and political violence, how the issue of silence create opportunities to engage with non-verbal forms of communication that can address traumatic and sensitive issues that survivors find difficult to mention. Personally, I felt it was a creative engagement with issues that require ongoing discussion, reflexivity and different forms of communication. The choice of visual engagement, as a form of promoting practitioner and academic work on peacebuilding themes, allowed us to witness hidden voices and their narratives of surviving the most difficult and challenging of circumstances.

LouisFrancis Monroy Santander

PhD Researcher
International Development Department
University of Birmingham