

Educating Memory: Srebrenica between History, Testimonies, and Global Citizenship

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Abstract

This article explores the pedagogical potential of teaching the Srebrenica genocide through an interdisciplinary approach that combines historical knowledge, survivor testimony, literature, visual arts, theatre, cinema, and experiential learning. Starting from a conceptual reflection on genocide, ethnic cleansing, and state-building processes in the former Yugoslavia, the study examines how the genocide perpetrated in Srebrenica in July 1995 can be integrated into contemporary educational practices aimed at fostering historical understanding, empathy, and civic responsibility.

The article argues that genocide education should move beyond the transmission of factual knowledge and engage students emotionally and ethically through encounters with individual stories, cultural representations, and sites of memory. Particular attention is devoted to autobiographical narratives such as Hasan Hasanović's *Surviving Srebrenica*, the literary works of Elvira Mujčić, the visual arts of Safet Zec, Šejla Kamerić, and Aida Šehović, as well as documentary photography and exhibitions that encourage reflection on memory, absence, gender, and post-conflict reconciliation. The study also examines the educational value of theatrical performances, including *The Flowers of Srebrenica*, and audiovisual resources such as Jasmila Žbanić's *Quo Vadis, Aida?*, Ado Hasanović's *My Father's Diaries*, and Zijad Ibrahimović's *The Boy from the Drina*.

Furthermore, the article highlights the significance of experiential learning projects such as *Srebrenica City of Hope*, which enable students to engage directly with places of memory, survivors, and contemporary initiatives promoting dialogue and reconciliation. By combining environmental education, travel, artistic expression, and public history practices, these initiatives transform remembrance into an active process of critical inquiry and civic engagement.

Ultimately, the article contends that teaching Srebrenica is not only essential for understanding the history of the Bosnian War but also for confronting contemporary challenges related to nationalism, discrimination, denial, and mass violence. Through a multidisciplinary educational framework, the memory of Srebrenica can contribute to the promotion of human rights, democratic values, and genocide prevention among younger generations.

Introduction

The teaching of the Srebrenica genocide represents a significant challenge and responsibility within contemporary education. As one of the most severe atrocities committed in Europe since the Second World War, the genocide of more than 8,000 Bosniak men and boys in July 1995 raises fundamental questions concerning human rights, collective memory, historical responsibility, and the prevention of future violence. Educational approaches to Srebrenica extend beyond the transmission of historical facts; they involve fostering critical reflection on the social, political, and cultural conditions that enabled genocide to occur.

This essay explores how the Srebrenica genocide can be addressed within educational contexts through an interdisciplinary and multimodal approach. Any analysis of the Srebrenica genocide must begin with an examination of the concept of genocide itself considering both its legal definition and its broader historical and ethical implications. Establishing a clear understanding of this category is

essential for situating the events of July 1995 within the wider framework of genocide studies and human rights education.

Following the discussion of the concept of genocide and its relevance within educational discourse, the teacher should provide a concise overview of the dissolution of the former Yugoslavia, with particular attention to the Bosnian War and the political, social, and ethnic dynamics that contributed to the outbreak of violence. This historical contextualization is necessary for understanding the circumstances that led to the events in and around Srebrenica in July 1995.

The analysis then focuses on the siege and subsequent fall of Srebrenica, examining the collapse of the United Nations–declared “safe area” and the failure of international protection mechanisms. Particular attention is devoted to reconstructing the events that occurred between 7 and 16 July 1995. This reconstruction addresses the situation within and around the United Nations compound in Potočari, the forced displacement of civilians, the so-called “Death March” undertaken by thousands of Bosniak men and boys attempting to reach Bosnian government-controlled territory, the systematic mass executions carried out by Bosnian Serb forces, and the disposal of victims in mass graves and the subsequent exhumation and relocation of human remains from primary to secondary and tertiary mass graves, a deliberate strategy aimed at concealing evidence of the crimes and obstructing future investigations.

By analyzing these events, the study seeks to provide a historically grounded understanding of the genocide while highlighting the importance of memory, documentation, and education in confronting denial and preserving the experiences of victims and survivors.

The essay then investigates a variety of pedagogical resources and memory practices that can facilitate engagement with the history and legacy of Srebrenica. Particular attention is devoted to oral and video testimonies of survivors, which provide powerful first-hand accounts of the genocide and its aftermath. Literary narratives are explored through Hasan Hasanović's memoir *Surviving Srebrenica* and the books of Elvira Mujčić, whose writings offer valuable perspectives on memory, displacement, identity, and post-war reconciliation.

Visual and artistic representations also constitute an important dimension of this study. These include the photographic exhibition *Around Srebrenica* by Alessandro Cocco, some paintings of the well-known Bosnian artist Safet Zec, and performative forms of remembrance such as *ŠTO TE NEMA*, conceived by artist Aida Šehović, which transform public spaces into sites of collective memory and reflection. The analysis further considers iconic visual documents, including photographs such as *No Teeth...? A Mustache...? Smell Like Shit? Bosnian Girl*, by Šejla Kamerić, which challenge stereotypes and encourage critical discussion of war, trauma, and representation.

Are also examined performances, such as *Flower of Srebrenica*, as particularly powerful educational tool for teaching about Srebrenica genocide. The educational potential of cinema and documentary filmmaking is examined through works such as *Quo Vadis, Aida?*, a 2020 internationally co-produced war film written, produced and directed by Jasmila Žbanić, *My Father's Diaries*, an autobiographic docu-film by Ado Hasanović, and *The Boy from the river Drina*, a documentary directed by Zijad Ibrahimovic, and all of which contribute to the transmission of memory across generations and provide accessible entry points for learners. Finally, the essay explores strategies for actively involving young people in memory work through environmental education, sustainable tourism, and community engagement initiatives. In this regard, the *Srebrenica – City of Hope* project serves as a significant example of how ecological awareness, intercultural dialogue, and experiential learning can foster meaningful connections between remembrance, social responsibility, and peacebuilding.

Teaching Srebrenica through Testimony: *Surviving Srebrenica*

A valuable educational resource for helping students understand the events that unfolded in Srebrenica between 1992 and 1995, culminating in the genocide of July 1995, is Hasan Hasanović's *Surviving Srebrenica*¹. The book is a moving autobiographical account written by Hasan Hasanović, a Bosniak survivor born in 1975 who lived through the genocide in which he lost both his father and his twin brother, attempting to reach Tuzla after the fall of Srebrenica.

Written for a young adult audience, the narrative offers readers an intimate perspective on the experiences of an ordinary rural family before, during, and after the war. The story begins with Hasan's childhood in eastern Bosnia, where he lived with his parents, grandparents, twin brother, and younger sibling in a small village. It then follows the family's forced displacement to Srebrenica as violence against Bosniak civilians intensified. The account traces the progression from the first shelling attacks to the fall of the enclave and the subsequent "Death March," during which thousands of Bosniak men attempted to escape through the forests toward government-controlled territory². The narrative continues with Hasan's arrival in the free territory of Nežuk and his difficult life as a refugee. It concludes with his emotionally challenging return to Srebrenica and with his employment in 2009 at the Srebrenica-Potočari Memorial Centre, where he began working as a guide for visitors. Significantly, the final section of the book, entitled *They Say It Never Happened*, addresses the continuing problem of genocide denial, one of the most persistent challenges facing post-war Bosnian society³.

From an educational perspective, the book provides an accessible and deeply human introduction to one of the darkest chapters of contemporary European history. Hasanović's testimony helps students understand how genocide could occur on European soil only fifty years after the Holocaust and encourages reflection on the fragility of human coexistence when confronted with nationalism, prejudice, and exclusionary ideologies⁴. By presenting historical events through the eyes of an individual survivor, the narrative bridges the gap between abstract historical knowledge and personal experience, fostering empathy as well as critical historical understanding. Such personal testimonies are widely recognized as powerful pedagogical tools in genocide education because they enable students to engage with historical events at both cognitive and emotional levels⁵.

The Italian edition of the book has a particularly meaningful educational origin. It emerged from a study trip organized by the Copernico High School in Verona, during which students met Hasan Hasanović in Srebrenica. Deeply impressed by his determination to bear witness to the atrocities he had experienced, the students decided to translate into Italian the story he had shared with them in English. Their aim was to make his testimony accessible to a wider audience and to contribute to the preservation and transmission of memory⁶. In this sense, the dissemination of Hasanović's words became an exercise in active citizenship and civic responsibility, transforming remembrance into critical engagement with the present. The students' initiative demonstrates how visits to sites of memory and encounters with survivors can evolve into meaningful educational projects that continue

¹ Hasanović, Hasan: *Surviving Srebrenica*, Verona, Gabrielli Editori, 2018.

² Rohde, David: *Endgame: The Betrayal and Fall of Srebrenica*, Boulder, Westview Press, 2012.

³ J. Subotić, «Holocaust and the Meaning of the Srebrenica Genocide: A Reflection on a Controversy», *Journal of Genocide Research*, 24(1), 2022, pp. 71–82.

⁴ Semelin, Jacques: *Purify and Destroy: The Political Uses of Massacre and Genocide*, New York, Columbia University Press, 2007.

⁵ Totten, Samuel: *Teaching about Genocide: Issues, Approaches, and Resources*, Charlotte, Information Age Publishing, 2018.

⁶ Nencioni, Chiara: «Un libro, una mostra e un viaggio: tre modi per affrontare (e rielaborare) Srebrenica», Novecento.org, 20, 2023. [DOI: 10.52056/9791254695371/12](https://doi.org/10.52056/9791254695371/12)

long after students return to the classroom, fostering historical awareness, ethical reflection, and a commitment to human rights⁷.

Teaching the Srebrenica Genocide through Literature: The Works of Elvira Mujčić

The works of Elvira Mujčić constitute an important educational resource for teaching about the Bosnian War, forced displacement, and the legacy of the Srebrenica genocide. Born in Loznica, Serbia, in 1980 and raised in Srebrenica, Mujčić experienced the violence of the Bosnian conflict firsthand before seeking refuge in Italy with a part of her family, while the father and the uncle died in the genocide. Her literary production occupies a distinctive position at the intersection of testimony, autobiographical narrative, and intercultural education, making it particularly valuable for pedagogical approaches aimed at fostering historical understanding and empathy among younger generations.

Unlike historical monographs, which often focus on military operations, political actors, and diplomatic developments, Mujčić's writings foreground the everyday experiences of civilians affected by war. Through personal memories and family stories, she reconstructs the gradual disintegration of a multicultural society and the transformation of neighbours into enemies under the pressure of nationalist ideologies. In works such as *Al di là del caos. Cosa rimane dopo Srebrenica*⁸ the genocide is not presented solely as a historical event but as a lived experience whose consequences continue to shape identities, memories, and social relations long after the end of armed conflict. *Al di là del caos* is a partly autobiographical narrative in which Elvira Mujčić reflects on her childhood in the former Yugoslavia, the outbreak of the Bosnian War, the experience of forced displacement, and the challenges of rebuilding a life in exile. Through a combination of personal memories, family stories, and historical reflection, the book reconstructs the gradual disintegration of a multicultural society and explores the enduring consequences of violence, loss, and uprootedness. Rather than focusing exclusively on the events of the Srebrenica genocide, Mujčić examines what remains "beyond the chaos": the persistence of memory, the search for identity, and the possibility of coexistence after war. The narrative offers readers an intimate perspective on the human impact of conflict while encouraging reflection on nationalism, prejudice, and the fragility of peaceful coexistence. The educational value of *Al di là del caos* lies precisely in its ability to connect individual experience with broader historical processes⁹. Through the author's personal story, students can approach the history of the Bosnian War not as a distant political event but as a lived human experience, thereby developing both historical understanding and empathy toward those affected by violence and displacement¹⁰.

Mujčić's works also provide an opportunity to explore themes of migration, exile, belonging, and cultural identity, thereby connecting the history of the Bosnian War to broader contemporary debates concerning refugees and intercultural coexistence.

Furthermore, her reflections on memory and post-war reconciliation help students understand that the consequences of genocide extend beyond the period of physical violence. The persistence of trauma, the challenges of rebuilding fractured communities, and the ongoing struggle against denial and

⁷ Assmann, Aleida: *Cultural Memory and Western Civilization: Functions, Media, Archives*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2011.

⁸ Mujčić, Elvira: *Al di là del caos. Cosa rimane dopo Srebrenica*, Roma, Infinito Edizioni, 2007.

⁹ Mejdanija, Mirza: «L'immagine del genocidio a Srebrenica nel libro *Al di là del caos. Cosa rimane dopo Srebrenica* di Elvira Mujčić», *Italica Belgradensia*, 1, (2025), pp. 97-115.

¹⁰ Corritore, Nicole: «*Al di là del caos*», *Osservatorio Balcani e Caucaso*, 27/02/2007 https://www.balcanicaucaso.org/cp_article/al-di-la-del-caos/ (accessed 9 June 2026).

historical revisionism emerge as central themes throughout her writings. In this sense, Mujčić's books contribute not only to the transmission of historical knowledge but also to the development of democratic citizenship and a culture of human rights, objectives that are increasingly recognized as fundamental components of genocide education.

Visualizing Srebrenica: *Around Srebrenica*

Another valuable educational resource for teaching about the Bosnian War and the Srebrenica genocide is the photographic exhibition *Around Srebrenica*, created through the collaboration between documentary photographer Alessandro Cocco and journalist Simonetta Di Zanutto. For many years, Cocco has focused on documentary photography and border-related issues, producing exhibitions on themes of identity, memory, and frontiers since 2005, while Di Zanutto has combined journalism, travel writing, and cultural reporting. The exhibition emerged from a reportage project that led the two authors through the Balkans and ultimately to Srebrenica on 11 July 2015, during the commemoration marking the twentieth anniversary of the genocide¹¹.

The title *Around Srebrenica* refers both to a geographical and a metaphorical journey. Rather than focusing exclusively on the events of July 1995, the exhibition seeks to explore the broader historical, cultural, and memorial landscape surrounding Srebrenica. The route documented by the exhibition passes through a number of significant locations in Bosnia and Herzegovina, with additional stops in Croatia, culminating in the annual commemorative ceremony held at the Potočari Memorial Centre, where victims of the genocide are remembered.

The exhibition consists of thirty black-and-white analogue photographs by Cocco accompanied by ten explanatory panels written by Di Zanutto. Together, images and texts create an alternative map of the region, guiding visitors through places that are often absent from mainstream historical narratives. While particular attention is devoted to the 11 July commemoration at Potočari, the exhibition also documents Serbian commemorative ceremonies associated with Petrovdan and explores the complexity of Balkan history through visits to little-known border villages that nevertheless witnessed some of the most violent episodes of ethnic conflict during the wars of the 1990s¹².

The photographic narrative captures not only the painstaking forensic work carried out by anthropologists at the Tuzla Identification Centre, where human remains recovered from mass graves continue to be identified, but also what the authors describe as the "skeletons of memory" scattered throughout villages such as Bratunac and Zvornik in eastern Bosnia. The exhibition further extends beyond Bosnia's borders to include sites in Croatia, most notably the Jasenovac Memorial, a place that evokes the legacy of fascist occupation and the crimes committed by the Ustaša regime during the Second World War. By linking different layers of historical violence, the exhibition encourages visitors to reflect on the interconnected nature of memory, trauma, and historical responsibility in the Balkans¹³.

The exhibition is accompanied by a catalogue published in 2016, which substantially expands the material presented in the gallery space. In addition to the original thirty photographs, the volume includes thirty-seven further images and additional texts, creating a more comprehensive reportage that seeks to navigate the intricate and often contested historical narratives of the former Yugoslavia. The catalogue also contains detailed maps that allow readers to locate the places depicted in the

¹¹ Cocco, Alessandro, and Simonetta Di Zanutto: *Around Srebrenica*, Pordenone, Olmis, 2016.

¹² <https://ritaglidiviaggio.it/2016/02/01/around-srebrenica-il-viaggio-diventa-mostra/> (accessed 9 June 2026).

¹³ Bevan, Robert: *The Destruction of Memory: Architecture at War*, London, Reaktion Books, 2006.

photographs, as well as an extensive bibliography and filmography dedicated to Balkan history and memory studies. Particularly significant is the catalogue's explicit rejection of simplistic interpretations of the past. As the authors note, the message emerging from Srebrenica is one that challenges simplification and banalization. The history of the Balkans, they argue, is inherently complex, and travelling through the region means accepting that unanswered questions will often outnumber definitive answers. Such an approach reflects broader trends in memory studies, which emphasize the importance of confronting historical complexity rather than reducing traumatic events to simplified narratives.

From a pedagogical perspective, *Around Srebrenica* is especially suitable for secondary-school students. The exhibition approaches even the most emotionally charged and difficult subjects with sensitivity and restraint, while the accompanying panels provide sufficient historical context to make the experience accessible to non-specialist audiences. It offers an opportunity to reflect on the enduring traces left by the Balkan wars, a topic that often receives limited attention in school curricula outside the former Yugoslavia. Through the combination of visual documentation, historical explanation, and personal engagement, the exhibition encourages students to develop critical historical awareness and empathy toward victims of mass violence.

For this reason, beginning in 2016, the exhibition was displayed in numerous Italian educational institutions and cultural venues, including the Zanon Technical Institute in Udine, the University of Pisa, the Martinelli Scientific High School in Udine, the Balkan Florence Express Festival, the Machiavelli-Capponi International High School in Florence, and the Galileo Scientific High School in Siena. In these contexts, the exhibition functioned not merely as a cultural event but as a pedagogical tool designed to stimulate discussion about war, memory, human rights, and democratic citizenship. Particularly noteworthy was the use of the exhibition at the Chini High School in Lido di Camaiore (Lucca), where it formed part of the educational project *Difficult Borders: Stories and Memories of the Twentieth Century*. Integrated into Italy's school-to-work learning programme, the project combined historical study, public history, and civic education. This experience demonstrates how visual representations of historical trauma can be incorporated into educational practice, transforming remembrance into an active process of learning and civic engagement¹⁴.

Painting Srebrenica: Safet Zec's Art and Genocide Education

Among the artistic resources that can be employed in teaching about the Srebrenica genocide, the work of Bosnian painter Safet Zec occupies a particularly significant place. Born in Rogatica in 1943 and forced into exile during the Bosnian War, Zec has devoted a substantial part of his artistic production to themes of displacement, loss, mourning, and human suffering¹⁵. Over the past two decades, he has developed several cycles of paintings—including *Exodus*, *Tears*, *Embraces*, and *Hands over Face*—inspired by the Srebrenica genocide, the siege of Sarajevo, and the broader experience of forced migration and exile. Through monumental figurative compositions, Zec transforms individual and collective trauma into a visual language capable of communicating the human consequences of mass violence beyond the limits of historical documentation.

Particularly relevant for genocide education is the *Exodus*¹⁶ cycle, which was exhibited in 2020 at the Srebrenica Memorial Center on the twenty-fifth anniversary of the genocide. The exhibition was installed in the former battery factory at Potočari, the very site where thousands of Bosniak civilians

¹⁴ Nencioni, Chiara: «Un libro, una mostra e un viaggio: tre modi per affrontare (e rielaborare) Srebrenica», Novecento.org, 20, 2023. DOI: [10.52056/9791254695371/12](https://doi.org/10.52056/9791254695371/12)

¹⁵ <https://www.safetzec.com/> (accessed 9 June 2026).

¹⁶ Zec, Safet: *Exodus*. Exhibition Catalogue. Potočari, Srebrenica Memorial Center, 2020.

sought refuge under United Nations protection before the massacre of July 1995¹⁷. The decision to display artworks dedicated to Srebrenica in the physical location where many victims spent their final hours created a powerful connection between art, memory, and place¹⁸. As the Memorial Center emphasized, the exhibition constituted an artistic testimony to human tragedy and the futility of violence, conveying through visual representation the anguish and destruction caused by genocide¹⁹.

From a pedagogical perspective, Zec's paintings offer important advantages for teaching difficult histories. Rather than depicting violence explicitly, the artist focuses on gestures, embraces, tears, hands, and fragmented bodies, encouraging viewers to engage emotionally and ethically with the suffering of victims. Such an approach is particularly valuable in educational settings because it avoids sensationalism while fostering empathy and critical reflection. Research on genocide education has shown that artistic and visual materials can help students develop a deeper understanding of historical trauma by complementing factual knowledge with emotional and moral engagement. Zec's works therefore function as what memory scholars describe as “affective mediators” enabling learners to approach traumatic pasts through symbolic representation rather than solely through statistics or historical narratives²⁰.

Moreover, the universal character of Zec's imagery allows educators to connect Srebrenica to broader discussions of human rights, displacement, war, and collective responsibility. While rooted in the Bosnian experience, his paintings deliberately transcend a single historical event and invite reflection on contemporary humanitarian crises. Zec himself has described his art as both a warning and a witness, intended to preserve the memory of victims while reminding viewers of the continuing dangers of hatred, exclusion, and violence. In this sense, his work contributes not only to remembrance but also to the preventive aims of genocide education, encouraging students to recognize the human consequences of intolerance and to develop a culture of empathy and democratic citizenship²¹.

Performing Absence: Aida Šehović's *ŠTO TE NEMA* and the Pedagogy of the Srebrenica Genocide

Among the artistic practices that have contributed most significantly to the memorialization of the Srebrenica genocide, the work of Bosnian-American artist Aida Šehović occupies a distinctive position. Unlike traditional monuments, which often rely on permanence, monumentality, and fixed locations, Šehović's project *ŠTO TE NEMA* (“Why Are You Not Here?”) is a participatory and nomadic memorial that uses performance art to represent absence, loss, and collective mourning²². Conceived in 2006 and repeated annually until 2025 in cities across Europe and North America, the project consisted of thousands of donated *fildžani* (traditional Bosnian coffee cups), each symbolizing

¹⁷ <https://srebrenicamemorial.org/en/exhibits/temporary-exhibitions/7> (accessed 9 June 2026).

¹⁸ Omerović, Azra Husarić, «Bosnian Artist Brings Srebrenica Paintings to Memorial Site», *Balkan Transitional Justice*, 97/07/2020 <https://balkaninsight.com/2020/07/07/bosnian-artist-brings-srebrenica-paintings-to-memorial-site/btj/> (accessed 9 June 2026).

¹⁹ Suljagić, Emir, ed.: *Exodus: Safet Zec at the Srebrenica Memorial Center*, Potočari, Srebrenica Memorial Center, 2020.

²⁰ Hickey-Moody, Anna and Mia Harrison, «Socially Engaged Art and Affective Pedagogy: A Study in Inter-Faith Understanding», *Tate Papers*, 29 (2018) <https://www.tate.org.uk/research/tate-papers/29/socially-engaged-art-and-affective-pedagogy> (accessed 9 June 2026).

²¹ <https://sarajevotimes.com/tears-and-prayer-exhibition-by-safet-zec-opened-in-the-city-hall> (accessed 9 June 2026).

²² Šehović, Aida: *ŠTO TE NEMA: A Nomadic Monument to the Victims of the Srebrenica Genocide*, Srebrenica, Srebrenica Memorial Center, 2020.

one of the 8,372 Bosniak men and boys murdered during the Srebrenica genocide²³. Participants were invited to arrange the cups and fill them with Bosnian coffee, which remained undrunk throughout the commemorative ritual. The untouched coffee cups thus became powerful symbols of those who would never return to share the everyday social practice of drinking coffee with family and friends²⁴.

From the perspective of genocide education, the significance of *ŠTO TE NEMA* lies precisely in its ability to make absence visible. Rather than representing violence directly, Šehović's work evokes the consequences of genocide through what is no longer present: the missing bodies, the interrupted relationships, and the empty places left within families and communities. Memory scholars have long emphasized that traumatic events are often communicated more effectively through traces, silences, and absences than through explicit representation. In this regard, *ŠTO TE NEMA* offers an alternative form of historical engagement, encouraging participants to reflect on genocide not only as a historical event but also as an enduring human loss that continues to shape the lives of survivors and descendants²⁵. The work transforms remembrance from passive observation into active participation, requiring visitors to contribute physically to the creation of the memorial and thereby assume a degree of responsibility for preserving memory²⁶.

The performative dimension of the project is particularly relevant in educational settings. Each annual iteration functioned not merely as an art installation but as a collective ritual of remembrance. Survivors, members of the Bosnian diaspora, local communities, and passers-by participated together in assembling the monument, filling the cups, and sharing stories about the genocide. Through this process, historical memory was transmitted not only through information but also through embodied experience and interpersonal encounter²⁷. Scholars of memory and public history have highlighted the pedagogical value of such participatory practices because they foster empathy, dialogue, and critical reflection while avoiding the emotional distancing that can result from purely factual approaches to teaching mass violence²⁸.

Furthermore, *ŠTO TE NEMA* challenges conventional understandings of memorialization by refusing closure. The monument was repeatedly assembled and dismantled, symbolizing both the ongoing search for victims' remains and the continuing struggle against denial and forgetting. The annual repetition of the performance reinforced the idea that remembrance is not a completed act but a continuous social and ethical responsibility. This aspect is especially valuable in genocide education, where one of the central objectives is not only to teach historical facts but also to cultivate awareness of the consequences of indifference, exclusion, and dehumanization. By connecting personal participation with collective memory, Šehović's work encourages students to understand remembrance as an active civic practice rather than a passive act of commemoration²⁹.

Photography, Gender, and the Pedagogy of Genocide: Šejla Kamerić's *Bosnian Girl*

²³ <https://www.stotenema.org/> (accessed 9 June 2026).

²⁴ <https://p-crc.org/our-work/creative-multimedia/art-activism/sto-te-nema/> (accessed 9 June 2026).

²⁵ <https://cgmap.org/projects/public-monument-sto-te-nema/> (accessed 9 June 2026).

²⁶ <https://www.laumeiersculpturepark.org/sto-te-nema> (accessed 9 June 2026).

²⁷ Zagalo, Nuno: «Performances of Memory: Mourning, Justice and the Srebrenica Genocide», *Performance Research* 28 (6–7), (2023), pp. 70–79.

²⁸ Gkitsa, Dimitra: «Performances of Memory: Collective resistance in the aftermath of violence», *Performance Research*, 28(3), (2023), pp. 5–11.

²⁹ Jaugaitė, Rimantė: «Digital remembrance: Honouring Srebrenica genocide victims via #ŠtoTeNema», *Memory, Mind & Media*, 3 (2024), pp. 1–22.

Among the artistic works that can be effectively employed in teaching the Srebrenica genocide, Šejla Kamerić's photographic project *Bosnian Girl* (2003) occupies a particularly important place³⁰. Born in Sarajevo in 1976, Kamerić belongs to a generation whose adolescence was profoundly shaped by the Bosnian War. Her work combines photography, performance, and conceptual art to explore issues of identity, gender, memory, and collective trauma³¹. In the context of genocide education, *Bosnian Girl* is especially valuable because it encourages students to reflect not only on the crimes committed in Srebrenica but also on the attitudes, prejudices, and failures that made those crimes possible³².

The artwork consists of a black-and-white self-portrait of the artist overlaid with a piece of graffiti discovered on the wall of a Dutch UN military barracks in Potočari: "No teeth...? A moustache...? Smell like shit...? Bosnian Girl!" The inscription had been written by an anonymous Dutch peacekeeper serving with the Dutch Battalion (*Dutchbat*), the United Nations force responsible for protecting the Srebrenica safe area. By placing these words over her own image, Kamerić transformed an expression of racism, sexism, and contempt into a powerful denunciation of the dehumanization experienced by Bosnian women during and after the war. The work exposes the prejudices that underlay international perceptions of Bosnians and simultaneously serves as an indictment of the international community's failure to protect the civilian population of Srebrenica³³.

From an educational perspective, *Bosnian Girl* offers an opportunity to address one of the most controversial aspects of the genocide: the conduct of the Dutch peacekeepers stationed in Srebrenica. Although heavily outnumbered and operating under restrictive United Nations rules of engagement, Dutchbat has been widely criticized for its inability—and in certain instances its willingness—to cooperate with Bosnian Serb forces during the evacuation of civilians from Potočari. The image therefore encourages critical discussion about international responsibility, moral courage, bystander behaviour, and the limitations of humanitarian intervention. Rather than portraying the Dutch peacekeepers as direct perpetrators, the artwork highlights the ethical implications of passivity in the face of mass violence and raises important questions about accountability when civilian populations are abandoned by those charged with their protection.

The educational significance of Kamerić's work is further enhanced by its focus on women. While the Srebrenica genocide primarily targeted Bosniak men and boys for extermination, women were subjected to forced displacement, psychological terror, and various forms of sexual violence that formed part of a broader campaign of ethnic cleansing. Throughout the Bosnian War, rape was systematically employed as a weapon of war and a tool of persecution designed to terrorize communities, destroy social bonds, and facilitate demographic transformation³⁴. The jurisprudence of the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia established a historic precedent by recognizing systematic wartime sexual violence as a crime against humanity and, under certain circumstances, as an element of genocidal policy³⁵. Consequently, discussions of Srebrenica and the

³⁰ Kamerić, Šejla: *Bosnian Girl*, Public art project, poster and photographic installation, 2003.

³¹ <https://sejlakameric.com/> (accessed 9 June 2026).

³² <https://www.paris-art.com/createurs/sejla-kameric/> (accessed 9 June 2026).

³³ <https://sarajevotimes.com/story-famous-bosnian-girl/> (accessed 9 June 2026).

³⁴ Stiglmayer, Alexandra, ed: *Mass Rape: The War Against Women in Bosnia-Herzegovina*, Lincoln, University of Nebraska Press, 1994.

³⁵ Škundrić, Aleksa: «Rape as a Crime Against Humanity and as a War Crime in the Context of the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia», *Romanian Journal of Legal History*, 5, (2025), pp. 87-105.

Bosnian War cannot be limited to mass executions alone but must also address the gendered dimensions of violence and victimization³⁶.

At the same time, *Bosnian Girl* challenges traditional representations of women as passive victims. Kamberić's direct gaze confronts the viewer and rejects the degrading stereotype imposed by the anonymous soldier. In doing so, the photograph becomes an act of symbolic resistance and self-definition. This aspect is particularly relevant for understanding post-war Bosnia and Herzegovina, where women have assumed an increasingly visible role in public memory, civil society activism, and the struggle for justice. Organizations such as the Mothers of Srebrenica have become central actors in preserving memory, advocating for accountability, and combating genocide denial. Through their activism, women transformed personal grief into a form of political agency that has profoundly shaped post-war Bosnian society³⁷.

The work also opens important discussions about changing gender identities in Bosnia after the war. Scholars have noted that post-war Bosnian society experienced both democratization and a renewed public visibility of religion, including a stronger presence of Islamic symbols and practices among parts of the Bosniak population. Within this context, women increasingly became visible markers of cultural and religious identity. Kamberić's art resists simplistic representations of Bosnian Muslim women, challenging both Western stereotypes and local patriarchal expectations. Her self-portrait presents a complex image of female subjectivity that transcends the dichotomy between victimhood and empowerment, making it particularly useful in educational contexts that seek to explore the intersections of gender, religion, memory, and post-conflict reconstruction.

Ultimately, *Bosnian Girl* demonstrates how photography can function as a powerful pedagogical tool for teaching difficult histories. By combining visual impact with historical and political critique, the artwork encourages students to engage with questions of prejudice, international responsibility, gender violence, and collective memory. Its enduring relevance lies in its ability to connect the specific history of Srebrenica to broader discussions of human rights, discrimination, and the moral obligations of individuals and institutions confronted with mass atrocity³⁸.

Performing Memory: *The Flowers of Srebrenica* as a Pedagogical Tool

Theatre can also serve as a particularly powerful educational tool for teaching about genocide, as it combines historical knowledge with emotional engagement and embodied experience. Unlike textbooks or documentary sources, theatrical performances enable audiences to encounter historical events through narrative, dialogue, and human interaction, fostering empathy while encouraging critical reflection. In the case of Srebrenica, theatre offers a means of communicating not only the facts of the genocide but also its long-term psychological and social consequences for survivors, families, and communities.

In the context of the Srebrenica genocide, an important example is *Flower of Srebrenica*, a theatrical production inspired by the experiences of survivors and by the symbolic significance of the Srebrenica Memorial Flower, which has become one of the most recognizable emblems of remembrance in post-war Bosnia and Herzegovina.

³⁶ Allen, Beverly: *Rape Warfare: The Hidden Genocide in Bosnia-Herzegovina and Croatia*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1996.

³⁷ Helms, Elissa: *Innocence and Victimhood: Gender, Nation, and Women's Activism in Postwar Bosnia-Herzegovina*, Madison, University of Wisconsin Press, 2013.

³⁸ <https://shabka.org/blog/2015/10/07/bosnian-girl-or-what-does-a-victim-look-like> (accessed 10 June 2026).

The Flowers of Srebrenica is produced by the London-based LegalAliens Theatre in co-production with the Sarajevo War Theatre (SARTR), with the support of Perform Europe and directed by Lara Parmiani³⁹. Rather than merely commemorating the Srebrenica genocide, Parmiani's work seeks to create what might be described as a space of active listening and ethical engagement. Drawing inspiration from Aidan Hehir's novel *The Flowers of Srebrenica*⁴⁰, the production is not a straightforward adaptation but a creative reinterpretation that transforms a historically specific tragedy into a universal reflection on human suffering, responsibility, and remembrance. In doing so, the play moves beyond the boundaries of Bosnia and Herzegovina, inviting audiences to consider how the legacy of Srebrenica continues to resonate within contemporary global debates on violence, memory, and human rights.

The narrative centres on Aidan, a Western academic who confronts the traumatic legacy of the genocide through his encounter with Mustafa, a survivor and former soldier who acts simultaneously as witness, guide, and mediator between past and present. Through their interactions, the performance challenges audiences to reflect upon the ethical implications of observing suffering from a distance. What does it mean to witness another people's trauma? Can empathy transcend geographical, cultural, and temporal boundaries? These questions lie at the heart of the production's pedagogical value⁴¹.

Particularly significant is the role of a chorus composed of women originating from countries affected by recent conflicts, including Bosnia and Herzegovina, Ireland, Rwanda, and Ukraine. These performers function as custodians of memory, narrators, and symbolic witnesses whose voices transcend the specific context of Srebrenica⁴². Through their presence, the play establishes connections between the Bosnian genocide and contemporary conflicts in regions such as Yemen, Sudan, Palestine, and Myanmar, emphasizing both the universality of human suffering and the continuing relevance of genocide prevention and human rights education. The chorus thus transforms the stage into a transnational space of remembrance in which different histories of violence intersect and illuminate one another.

From an educational perspective, *The Flowers of Srebrenica* demonstrates the capacity of theatre to foster emotional engagement while simultaneously encouraging critical reflection. By combining historical memory with artistic representation, the production invites audiences to move beyond passive commemoration and to interrogate their own position as witnesses to distant suffering. The performance thus contributes to what scholars of memory studies have described as an ethics of remembrance, in which memory is not confined to the preservation of the past but becomes a catalyst for civic responsibility and social action.

This pedagogical dimension is further reinforced by the mission of LegalAliens Theatre⁴³, a company founded to provide a platform for artists whose lives have been shaped by migration, displacement, and experiences of otherness. Within this framework, *The Flowers of Srebrenica* emerges as both an artistic and political intervention, encouraging audiences to reconsider notions of belonging, solidarity, and collective responsibility. Ultimately, the production exemplifies how contemporary

³⁹ Parmiani, Lara, and Becka McFadde: *The Flowers of Srebrenica*. Theatre script and production materials, London/Sarajevo, LegalAliens Theatre and SARTR, 2025.

⁴⁰ Hehir, Aidan: *The Flowers of Srebrenica*, Tirana, Qendra Për Zhvillimin, 2022.

⁴¹ Rosenthal, Joanne, «Exhibiting Absence and Loss: Objects, Narratives, and Trauma on Display », in Maria M. Delgado, Michal Kobialka, Bryce Lease (eds): *Staging Difficult Pasts, Transnational Memory, Theatres, and Museums*, London, Routledge, 2024, pp. 259-269.

⁴² <https://warmfoundation.org/projects/the-flowers-of-srebrenica/> (accessed 10 June 2026).

⁴³ <https://legalalienstheatre.com/> (accessed 10 June 2026).

theatre can function as a powerful tool of genocide education, transforming memory into dialogue and remembrance into a commitment to preventing future atrocities.

The educational potential of *The Flowers of Srebrenica* has been further reinforced by the international tour organized in 2025 to mark the thirtieth anniversary of the genocide. Produced by the Sarajevo War Theatre (SARTR), the London-based LegalAliens Theatre, and the MESS International Theatre Festival, the production premiered in Sarajevo on 9–10 July 2025 before travelling to Tuzla, Belgrade, London, Oslo, and Pisa.

Particularly significant from a pedagogical perspective was the decision to accompany many performances with structured public discussions involving academics, teachers, artists, researchers, and members of civil society. In London, Oslo, and Pisa, post-performance panels encouraged audiences to reflect on questions of memory transmission, witnessing, historical responsibility, denial, and the ethical challenges involved in representing traumatic pasts through artistic media. These events were conceived not as ancillary activities but as an integral component of the project's educational mission, transforming theatre into a space of dialogue and critical inquiry. According to the organizers, the debates sought to create “glocal encounters” connecting local experiences of memory with broader international concerns regarding violence, propaganda, and the preservation of historical truth⁴⁴.

The Oslo performances are particularly noteworthy because they included dedicated school matinees and an extensive after-talk entitled *Victims, Witnesses, Violence: Whose Memories Deserve to Be Told?* The discussion brought together scholars such as Aidan Hehir, Research Professor Cindy Horst, and Associate Professor Merete Røstad to examine issues of memory, ethics, migration, public space, and representation⁴⁵.

During its performances at the Teatro Nuovo in Pisa on 14 and 15 November 2025, the production was presented as an opportunity for both the university community and the wider public to reflect on the legacy of the Srebrenica genocide and, more broadly, on the unresolved wounds of contemporary Europe. Through the company's distinctive combination of physical theatre, visual storytelling, irony, and emotional intensity, personal and collective suffering is transformed into an invitation to listening, dialogue, and shared responsibility. Particularly noteworthy from a pedagogical perspective is the post-performance discussion held on 15 November 2025 under the title *Theatre and Migration: Staging Solidarity*, moderated by Szabolcs Musca. The event brought together scholars from different disciplines, including Pierluigi Musarò (University of Bologna), Chiara Nencioni (University of Pisa), and Sara Francesca Soncini (University of Pisa), to examine the capacity of theatre to foster solidarity, create communities of remembrance, and challenge exclusionary narratives about migrants and cultural others. Such discussions demonstrate how theatrical performances can function not merely as artistic representations of historical events but also as platforms for critical dialogue, public history, and civic engagement.

As director Lara Parmiani observed, the project sought to move beyond passive empathy and stimulate reflection on rising nationalism, disinformation, denial, and the social mechanisms that enable mass violence. In this respect, *The Flowers of Srebrenica* exemplifies the growing role of theatre as a pedagogical practice capable of combining historical knowledge, emotional engagement, and critical citizenship⁴⁶.

⁴⁴ <https://www.newtidesplatform.org/srebrenica-panels> (accessed 10 June 2026).

⁴⁵ <https://rommenscene.no/program/the-flowers-of-srebrenica> (accessed 10 June 2026).

⁴⁶ <https://theqr.co.uk/2025/10/18/lara-parmiani-on-witnessing-and-the-flowers-of-srebrenica> (accessed 10 June 2026).

Screening Srebrenica: *Quo Vadis, Aida?* and Genocide Education

Among the most effective audiovisual resources for teaching the Srebrenica genocide is Jasmila Žbanić's film *Quo Vadis, Aida?* (2020), widely regarded as one of the most significant cinematic representations of the Bosnian War. The film is based on *Under the UN Flag*⁴⁷, a book written by Hasan Nuhanović, a Bosnian survivor, former UN interpreter for Dutch peacekeepers, who lost his entire family, father Ibro, mother Nasiha and brother Muhamed, which were in Potočari UN nation compound.

Quo Vadis, Aida reconstructs the events surrounding the fall of Srebrenica in July 1995 through the perspective of Aida Selmanagić, a Bosniak schoolteacher employed as an interpreter for the United Nations Dutch Battalion. By focusing on the experiences of a single individual caught between the civilian population and the international peacekeeping apparatus, the film provides students with an accessible yet historically grounded narrative through which to understand the dynamics of genocide, the vulnerability of civilians, and the consequences of political and military failure⁴⁸.

One of the film's principal educational strengths lies in its portrayal of the collapse of the United Nations "safe area" and the inability of the international community to protect the population it had pledged to defend. Through Aida's increasingly desperate attempts to save her husband and sons, viewers witness the gradual disintegration of humanitarian protection and the moral dilemmas faced by those trapped within structures incapable of preventing mass violence. The film therefore encourages critical reflection on issues of international responsibility, peacekeeping, and the ethical obligations of states and international organizations confronted with atrocity crimes. In this respect, *Quo Vadis, Aida?* offers a valuable complement to historical sources and legal documents by humanizing the institutional failures that contributed to the genocide⁴⁹.

The film is equally important for its representation of gender and memory. By placing a woman at the centre of the narrative, Žbanić challenges traditional war narratives that often privilege military actors and battlefield events⁵⁰. Aida embodies the experiences of thousands of Bosnian women who survived the genocide, endured displacement, searched for missing relatives, and became central actors in post-war memory activism. Moreover, the perspective of a female protagonist enables students to engage with the genocide not only as a political and military event but also as a profoundly human tragedy affecting families, communities, and everyday life.

From a pedagogical standpoint, *Quo Vadis, Aida?* is particularly effective because it combines emotional engagement with historical accuracy. While avoiding graphic representations of violence, the film conveys the atmosphere of fear, uncertainty, and abandonment that characterized the final days of the Srebrenica enclave. Educational research has shown that films can serve as powerful tools in genocide education when accompanied by critical discussion and contextualization, allowing students to connect factual knowledge with emotional understanding and ethical reflection⁵¹.

⁴⁷ Nuhanović, Hasan: *Under the UN Flag: The International Community and the Srebrenica Genocide*, Sarajevo, DES, 2007

⁴⁸ Husanović, Jasmina: «Witnessing Srebrenica through Film: Memory, Trauma and Representation in *Quo Vadis, Aida?*», *Southeastern Europe* 45 (3), 2021, pp. 341–357.

⁴⁹ Power, Samantha: *A Problem from Hell: America and the Age of Genocide*, New York, Basic Books, 2002.

⁵⁰ Žbanić, Jasmila: *Quo Vadis, Aida?*, Deblokada Film and Coop99 Filmproduktion, 2020.

⁵¹ Schinck, Renée: *Teaching the Hard Lessons: Dutch History Teachers' Pedagogical Experiences with Teaching about the Srebrenica Genocide in the Framework of Genocide Education*, Master's Thesis, Uppsala University, 2024.

Furthermore, the final scenes, which depict Aida's return to post-war Srebrenica, underscore the enduring legacy of genocide and the challenges of rebuilding social life after mass violence. The juxtaposition of memory and everyday normality invites students to consider the long-term consequences of atrocity crimes and the ongoing processes of remembrance, reconciliation, and denial. In this sense, *Quo Vadis, Aida?* transcends the boundaries of historical reconstruction and becomes a powerful medium through which younger generations can engage with the moral and civic questions raised by the genocide of Srebrenica⁵².

Teaching Srebrenica through Family Memory: Ado Hasanović's *My Father's Diaries*

Among the most recent audiovisual resources available for teaching the Bosnian War and the Srebrenica genocide, Ado Hasanović's documentary *My Father's Diaries* (*I diari di mio padre*, 2024) offers a particularly valuable contribution⁵³. Born in Srebrenica in 1986 and now based in Italy, Hasanović belongs to the generation whose childhood was marked by war, displacement, and the long aftermath of genocide. The documentary is constructed around a collection of videotapes and diaries written by the filmmaker's father during the years of conflict and post-war reconstruction. By intertwining personal testimony, family memory, archival materials, and contemporary reflections, the film provides an intimate perspective on the impact of genocide and forced displacement across generations. Rather than focusing exclusively on the events of July 1995, it explores the broader human consequences of violence, including exile, trauma, memory transmission, and the search for belonging in post-war Bosnia and Herzegovina.

From a pedagogical perspective, *My Father's Diaries* is particularly effective because it bridges the gap between public history and private memory. Educational research on genocide teaching has repeatedly emphasized the importance of personal narratives in helping students understand historical events not merely as abstract processes but as lived experiences affecting individuals and families⁵⁴. Through the diaries of his father, Hasanović reconstructs the everyday reality of a society descending into war and reveals how ordinary people experienced political collapse, ethnic polarization, and displacement. This focus on daily life allows students to appreciate the human dimension of genocide, fostering empathy while maintaining historical rigor.

The documentary also offers an opportunity to examine the intergenerational transmission of memory. As scholars of memory studies have observed, the descendants of survivors often play a crucial role in preserving and reinterpreting traumatic pasts, transforming inherited memories into new forms of cultural expression⁵⁵. Hasanović's film exemplifies this process. By engaging with his father's writings, the director not only preserves a family archive but also invites viewers to reflect on the ways in which the legacy of genocide continues to shape identities and relationships decades after the violence itself has ended.

Particularly noteworthy is the use of the documentary in educational contexts in Italy. Special screenings organized for secondary-school students have demonstrated the film's capacity to stimulate historical understanding and civic engagement. Among the most significant initiatives were screenings held at the Cinema La Compagnia–Spazio Alfieri in Florence and at the Liceo Scientifico

⁵² Acar, Nihal: «Srebrenitsa soykırımının Bosnasinemasında temsili: “Nereyegidiyorsun Aida? Filmininsosyolojik analizi», *İçtimaiyat*, 2023, pp. 128- 151.

⁵³ Hasanović, Ado: *My Father's Diaries* (*I diari di mio padre*), Documentary film, 2024.

⁵⁴ Totten, Samuel: *Teaching about Genocide: Issues, Approaches, and Resources*, Charlotte, Information Age Publishing, 2018

⁵⁵ Hirsch, Marianne: *The Generation of Postmemory: Writing and Visual Culture After the Holocaust*, New York, Columbia University Press, 2012.

“Ulisse Dini” in Pisa, where students were able to view the documentary and subsequently participate in discussions with the filmmaker, teachers, historians, and university scholars specializing in the history of the former Yugoslavia and memory studies. These post-screening debates transformed the viewing experience into an active educational process. Such encounters are particularly valuable because they move beyond the passive consumption of audiovisual materials. Through dialogue with educators and scholars, students are encouraged to critically evaluate historical narratives, consider the ethical implications of remembrance, and explore the challenges of transmitting difficult histories to new generations. The discussions following the screenings highlighted themes such as the importance of testimony, the persistence of genocide denial, the role of memory in democratic societies, and the responsibility of citizens to confront discrimination and exclusion. In this sense, the documentary functioned not only as a historical source but also as a catalyst for civic education and critical reflection.

Teaching Srebrenica through Documentary Film: *The Boy from the Drina*

Among the documentary films that can be effectively employed in teaching the history of the Bosnian War and the Srebrenica genocide, *The Boy from the Drina* (*Il ragazzo della Drina*) occupies a particularly significant place⁵⁶. The director Zijad Ibrahimović, born in 1978 in Loznica, Bosnia and Herzegovina, fled his country with his family in 1992 when war broke out, and now lives in Switzerland. The film follows Irvin Mujčić, a young returnee to his hometown, Srebrenica, two decades after the conflict. His journey is motivated by a desire to confront the enduring legacy of wartime trauma and to transform personal and collective memory into a project of renewal through the reconstruction of a traditional village in the forests surrounding the town⁵⁷. The documentary explores the long-lasting consequences of genocide through the personal story of a survivor whose life was profoundly shaped by the events of July 1995. Rather than focusing exclusively on the military and political dimensions of the genocide, the film foregrounds individual experience, memory, and resilience, thereby enabling viewers to engage with history through the perspective of those who endured violence and displacement firsthand.

From a pedagogical perspective, the documentary is especially valuable because it presents historical events through the eyes of a young protagonist, making complex and traumatic topics more accessible to students. By linking personal biography to broader historical processes, the film encourages learners to move beyond abstract statistics and develop a deeper understanding of the human consequences of genocide. In this respect, *The Boy from the Drina* serves as an important bridge between historical knowledge and emotional engagement. The documentary also provides an opportunity to explore key themes such as forced displacement, loss, identity, and the reconstruction of life after mass violence. Through its focus on memory and survival, the film highlights the enduring impact of genocide on individuals and communities, illustrating how traumatic experiences continue to shape personal and collective identities decades after the end of conflict. Such themes are particularly relevant in educational contexts because they allow students to connect the history of Srebrenica with broader contemporary issues concerning refugees, human rights, and post-conflict reconciliation.

The educational potential of the documentary was demonstrated during its screening at the Istituto Storico di Modena, where the film was presented to an audience largely composed of young people and students. The event was attended by director Zijad Ibrahimović and the protagonist Irvin Mujčić, whose presence transformed the screening into an opportunity for direct dialogue between filmmakers

⁵⁶ Ibrahimović, Zijad: *The Boy from the Drina* (*Il ragazzo della Drina*), Documentary film, 2025.

⁵⁷ Facnella, Nicola: «Il ragazzo della Drina», *Osservatorio dei Balcani e Caucaso*, 04/04/2025 https://www.balcanicaucaso.org/cp_article/il-ragazzo-della-drina/ (accessed 11 June 2026).

and viewers. Following the projection, participants engaged in a discussion addressing the historical context of the Bosnian War, the challenges of representing genocide through cinema, and the importance of preserving memory among younger generations. The discussion that followed the screening further underscored the role of documentary film as a form of public history. By bringing together students, educators, historians, and filmmakers, the event created a space in which historical knowledge could be debated and collectively interpreted. This interactive dimension reflects contemporary approaches to genocide education, which emphasize dialogue, critical thinking, and civic engagement as essential components of learning about difficult histories. In this sense, *The Boy from the Drina* functions not only as a documentary record of survival but also as a pedagogical tool capable of fostering historical consciousness and democratic citizenship.

Experiencing Srebrenica: *Srebrenica City of Hope* and Experiential Genocide Education

One of the most innovative educational initiatives aimed at transforming the memory of the Srebrenica genocide into a source of hope and civic engagement is the project *Srebrenica City of Hope*. Established in 2017 through the collaboration between the Bosnian association *Prijatelji Prirode Oaza Mira*, which currently manages the initiative, and the Italian environmental organization *Gruppo Italiano Amici della Natura*, the project was conceived by Irvin Mujčić (the protagonist of the documentary *The boy of the Drina*), a Bosnian survivor born in Srebrenica in 1987 who arrived in Italy as a refugee at the age of five and later acquired Italian citizenship.

Mujčić's return to Srebrenica was motivated not only by a personal search for his roots—and, symbolically, for traces of his father, who was murdered during the genocide and whose remains are still missing—but also by a desire to reconnect the city with a future beyond its association with mass violence. Historically known as the Roman mining settlement of *Argentaria*, Srebrenica is today internationally remembered primarily as the site of the genocide commemorated every year on 11 July. The project seeks to broaden this narrative by presenting the town not exclusively as a place of death and mourning but also as a space of resilience, encounter, and renewal⁵⁸.

The initiative aims to promote sustainable tourism in a region once renowned for its natural beauty but now largely identified with the atrocities of the Bosnian War. By attracting visitors, supporting local families, and creating employment opportunities, *Srebrenica City of Hope* contributes to the economic revitalization of an area profoundly affected by conflict, depopulation, and social fragmentation⁵⁹. In doing so, it challenges what has been described in memory studies as the risk of transforming sites of atrocity into static “open-air cemeteries,” instead encouraging forms of remembrance that are connected to everyday life and future-oriented community development⁶⁰.

Many participants in the programme, including numerous Italian and international students, stay with local host families or at Ekometeta Village, a small eco-tourism complex consisting of twelve wooden houses built according to traditional Bosnian architectural techniques⁶¹. Educational activities include guided excursions to sites of natural and historical significance, such as the Drina Canyon, walks along forest trails linking rural villages, horseback riding, boat trips, and visits to the Srebrenica

⁵⁸ Nencioni, Chiara: «Recovery from genocide through tourism: Srebrenica City of Hope Project», *Tourism and Heritage Journal*, 6 (2024), 1–21.

⁵⁹ Kühnas, Cornelia: «Srebrenica – City of Hope, Overcoming the trenches of war and creating new perspectives with sustainable tourism», *Infomail Wissenschaft*, 9 (2022) <https://www.nf-int.org/en/info-mail/infomail-wissenschaft-nr-9-english-version-july-2022#srebrenicaEN>

⁶⁰ Dere, İlker and Ceren Hatipoğlu and Şerif Hatipoğlu: «Sites of dark tourism as out-of-school learning environments in high school history teaching programs», *Odüsobiad*, 15, (2025), pp. 2132-2174.

⁶¹ Corritore, Nicole: «Srebrenica, la pace dell'oasi Ekometeta», *Osservatorio dei Balcani e Caucaso*, 07/08/2025 https://www.balcanicaucaso.org/cp_article/srebrenica-la-pace-delloasi-ekometeta/

Memorial Centre at Potočari, located within the former Dutch UN base⁶². These visits are often accompanied by survivors, witnesses, and professional guides who provide historical context and personal testimony, allowing participants to connect historical knowledge with lived experience.

The project pursues three interconnected educational objectives. First, it promotes knowledge of the genocide, its historical context, and the processes through which memory is preserved and transmitted, particularly through oral testimony and personal narratives. Second, it encourages direct engagement with the territory, landscape, and cultural heritage of eastern Bosnia, enabling participants to understand Srebrenica as a living community rather than solely as a site of trauma. Third, it provides a sustainable source of income for local residents who have chosen to remain in a region deeply scarred by war and economic hardship⁶³.

Particularly significant from a pedagogical perspective is the opportunity for students to meet young Bosniaks and Bosnian Serbs who are actively engaged in rebuilding relationships across ethnic divides. Individuals such as Irvin Mujčić have undertaken the difficult task of fostering dialogue and reconstructing forms of communal coexistence despite frequently facing suspicion, criticism, or accusations of betraying their respective communities. Their experiences offer students a powerful example of reconciliation in practice and demonstrate the personal courage required to challenge inherited narratives of division and hostility.

As Chiara Nencioni⁶⁴ has observed in her reflections on educational journeys to Bosnia and Herzegovina, encounters with young survivors and memory activists often have a particularly profound impact on students because they differ markedly from the traditional model of witnessing associated with elderly survivors of the Holocaust or the Second World War. Participants meet individuals who are only slightly older than themselves yet carry within their biographies the legacy of genocide, displacement, and post-war reconstruction. Their stories of loss, resilience, and commitment to building a peaceful future make the history of Srebrenica tangible and emotionally accessible. According to Nencioni, these encounters frequently become transformative educational experiences that encourage students to develop greater historical awareness, civic responsibility, and empathy toward those affected by violence and discrimination.

In this respect, *Srebrenica City of Hope* represents an exemplary model of experiential genocide education. By combining historical learning, direct engagement with places of memory, intercultural dialogue, and active participation in contemporary community life, the project moves beyond commemorative practices centred exclusively on mourning. Instead, it encourages young people to understand remembrance as a dynamic process linked to responsibility, reconciliation, and the construction of a more inclusive future⁶⁵.

Conclusion

⁶² <https://srebrenicahope.wordpress.com/> (accessed 11 June 2026).

⁶³ Niedermayr, Michaela *Konzeptionierung einer Kultur- und Abenteuerrekkingtour in Bosnien-Herzegowina*, Master's thesis at the study programme Health Management in Tourism, FH JOANNEUM, Bad Gleichenberg, 2016.

⁶⁴ Nencioni, Chiara: «Didattica viaggiando su confini difficili», *Documenti a Studi*, 44 (2018), pp. 65-108.

⁶⁵ Nencioni, Chiara: «Un libro, una mostra e un viaggio: tre modi per affrontare (e rielaborare) Srebrenica», *Novecento.org*, 20, 2023. DOI: [10.52056/9791254695371/12](https://doi.org/10.52056/9791254695371/12)

Addressing the Srebrenica genocide in educational settings can contribute to the development of historical consciousness, empathy, and civic responsibility among learners. Through the examination of survivor testimonies, memorial practices, and post-conflict reconciliation initiatives, students are encouraged to engage with complex narratives of suffering, resilience, and justice. Moreover, education about Srebrenica plays a crucial role in countering denial, revisionism, and discriminatory ideologies, thereby supporting democratic values and intercultural understanding.

In this context, educational projects, commemorative activities, and experiential learning opportunities offer valuable tools for connecting historical knowledge with contemporary concerns. By integrating the study of Srebrenica into broader frameworks of peace education, human rights education, and genocide prevention, educators can promote a deeper understanding of the consequences of hatred and exclusion while fostering a commitment to peace, dialogue, and social responsibility.