

Spring 2010

# Perceptions of the International Media in Post-Conflict Srebrenica, Bosnia-Herzegovina

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*SIT Study Abroad*

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Perceptions of the International Media in Post-Conflict Srebrenica, Bosnia-Herzegovina

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for Balkans: Post-Conflict

Transformation in Croatia, Serbia and Bosnia-Herzegovina, SIT Study Abroad, Spring 2010

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## Acknowledgments

I would like to thank the following people for their assistance and support throughout my independent study project: my family members, for their investment in my academic career and consistent support while studying both at home and abroad; my academic advisor, Jagoda Gregulska, for her enthusiastic assistance and guidance while working in Srebrenica; my academic director, Orli Fridman, for her guidance not only during my independent study project, but throughout the entire semester; Lawrence Rosenfeld, for his guidance as my UNC faculty advisor; Gordana Boric, for her unfailing support and immeasurable contribution to this study abroad program; Marija Bosnjak and Vesna Krajisnik, for their patience and careful instruction of Croatian/Bosnian/Serbian/Montenegrin languages; the Skaric and Bubnjevic families, for taking me into their homes and making my homestays in Croatia and Serbia truly insightful and enjoyable experiences; Anesa Begic and her family, for their kindness and hospitality while staying in Srebrenica and Sarajevo; Biljana Ilic, for her help with translating the interview consent form; and finally, all of my friends in Srebrenica for their contributions to my research and irreplaceable experience in their beautiful town.

## Abstract

This paper explores the perceptions of residents of Srebrenica, Bosnia-Herzegovina regarding the international media in the post-conflict era. In doing so, the research aims to find out if international media presence and reporting have any impact on local reconciliation processes in Srebrenica. Srebrenica was the sight of siege and eventually a massacre during the wars of the breakup of Yugoslavia. Since the massacre occurred under the supposed protection of the international community, Srebrenica has since become a major focus of international media attention.

Having spent a month in the spring of 2010 in Srebrenica, my primary methodology for research was semi-structured interviews with twelve residents of Srebrenica. They shared with me their opinions and impressions of international media, which I then analyzed according to my literature review, composed of relevant case studies of media perception in a post-conflict community, and relevant publications about Srebrenica today.

Conclusions indicated that interviewees maintained mixed opinions regarding the contribution of international media to local reconciliation processes, and there was no clearly stated negative or positive impact. Interviewees pointed out positive and negative elements of international media presence in and reporting of Srebrenica regarding reconciliation, and pointed out that local media have a greater impact on reconciliation processes in the town and in Bosnia-Herzegovina today.

## Introduction

The aim of this paper is to explore the perceptions of the international media in Srebrenica, Bosnia-Herzegovina (hereafter referred to as Bosnia) in the post-conflict era. Srebrenica, a small town in eastern Bosnia, was the site of siege and eventually a massacre during the wars of the break-up of Yugoslavia. Considered the site of the worst atrocities in Europe after 1945, after over two years of siege by Bosnian Serb forces, over 8,000 Bosnian Muslim or Bosniak men and boys were killed in Srebrenica in July, 1995 (Duijzings, pg. 1). What sets Srebrenica apart from other war crimes committed in the former Yugoslavia during the 1990s is the fact that this massacre, also referred to as the Srebrenica genocide,<sup>1</sup> took place under the protection of the United Nations and other members of the international community.<sup>2</sup> Due to the international community's failure to prevent this massacre in the middle of Europe in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, Srebrenica has since become a highly publicized town and a center for international media<sup>3</sup> discourse.

An undergraduate at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (UNC), I am a student of international studies with a focus on Eastern Europe and global health. Also a student of public relations, I am a student in the UNC School of Journalism and Mass Communication. I am currently studying abroad with the School for International Training (SIT) in the program

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<sup>1</sup> Both the ICTY and ICJ have classified the events which took place in July, 1995, in Srebrenica as genocide. (Prosecutor v. Radovan Krstic <http://www.icty.org/x/cases/krstic/acjug/en/krs-aj040419e.pdf> p. 6; Application of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (Bosnia and Herzegovina v. Serbia and Montenegro) <http://www.icj-cij.org/docket/index.php?sum=479&code=bhy&p1=3&p2=3&case=91&k=f4&p3=5> p.1)

<sup>2</sup> "International community" in the context of this paper refers to institutions such as the United Nations, NATO, foreign governments (particularly in Europe and North America), and other organizations whose mission is to protect and aid civilians in times of armed conflicts. The international media are also included in this definition.

<sup>3</sup> "International media" in the context of this paper refers to all media from countries outside of Bosnia-Herzegovina, including the regional media of Croatia, Serbia and Montenegro.

entitled SIT Balkans: Post-Conflict Transformation in Croatia, Serbia, and Bosnia. On our excursion trip to Bosnia, we came to Srebrenica, and it was during this time that I began to think about the role of outsiders<sup>4</sup> in local dynamics of reconciliation. I decided that for my independent research project, I would like to look at local perceptions of the international media in Srebrenica. In particular, I am seeking to examine if the international media have an impact on local reconciliation processes in Srebrenica.

The fact that I am a student of journalism and mass communication is just one element of my positionality that dictates my stand as a researcher. Coursework and experience have given me the tools and background knowledge with which to be somewhat critical of the field and to have expectations that might not necessarily be realistic. Journalists, particularly when their work pertains to conflicts, face tremendous ethical dilemmas between journalistic values of detachment and objectivity, and individual subjectivities. I understand this classic dilemma and try to take it into consideration throughout the paper. Another element of my positionality is that I am a member of STAND, which is a student-led anti-genocide coalition. My activism in advocacy efforts for U.S. policy regarding current conflicts in Sudan, Democratic Republic of Congo, Sri Lanka and Burma is certainly a major component of my interest in researching more about the international community and Srebrenica. I have great interest regarding the role of the international community in regions of both current conflict and post-conflict reconstruction. I therefore chose to come back to Srebrenica to investigate further the role of outside actors there, specifically the international media.

In my literature review, I provide the contextual background of Srebrenica, including recent history and current issues in Srebrenica. I am also looking at a comparative case study

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<sup>4</sup> For the purposes of this paper, I am using the term *outsider* to refer to any person who is not from the region of the former Yugoslavia.

and relevant works which describe Srebrenica today. The methodology discusses the interview process by which I obtained data. The methodology also includes the limitations and biases of the study. I then provide an interview analysis section, where I discuss the interviews and analyze them according to the texts of the literature review. The final section includes the conclusions made from the research and further recommendations for study.



## Literature Review

In this section, I provide contextual information regarding both pre-war and present day Srebrenica, relevant case studies, and relevant publications dealing with Srebrenica and its representation. The task of providing sufficient background and contextual information regarding Srebrenica for the purposes of this paper is difficult for me to do as even agreed-upon “facts” are constantly disputed. Recounting the historical events of the war in the 1990s is not the focus of my paper; however, I will attempt to provide a brief, comprehensive means of better understanding the context of this town. Surprisingly, I was not able to find much academic work regarding the media in the post-conflict period, and it seemed that most research instead pertained to the role of the media during the conflict. I also found little academic research regarding the perceptions of international media in post-conflict communities of the people who live there and experienced the conflict and its aftermath. I therefore use case study analyses to piece together some of the points I want to make about the potential impact of outsiders, specifically media, in post-conflict Srebrenica as it may relate to other post-conflict communities.

I had hoped to find a case study regarding perceptions of international media in post-genocide Rwanda, and, surprisingly, I found only very limited material. Due the similar traits in Rwanda, particularly the fact that the Rwandan genocide occurred in the same time period as Srebrenica and exemplified similar failure of the international community, I thought this would have made an interesting comparison. However, most of the information that I came across discussed the importance of the international community overseeing the development of democratic media in post-conflict societies, rather than the perceptions of international media.

### *Historical and Contextual Background*

Nestled in the hills of eastern Bosnia, in the pre-war period, Srebrenica's beauty attracted tourists not only from Yugoslavia, but also from many other European countries. From its healing springs and wellness center located on Guber, to the hunting and fishing tourism, Srebrenica was a flourishing town with even greater economic potential (Sekulic, Personal Interview, 2010). Before the wars of the 1990s, the majority of Srebrenica's inhabitants were Bosnian Muslims or Bosniaks; however, there was also a significant number of Serbs (Gregulska 8). Ethnic divisions in multiethnic cities like Srebrenica were virtually nonexistent during the period of socialist Yugoslavia. Yugoslavia's socialist regime was perfectly aware of the atrocities committed by all ethnic groups against the other in the region of South Central Europe, notably during the World War II but also in centuries prior, and for this reason established a national narrative based on class distinctions, rather than ethnic distinctions (Miller 7). In this manner, the various ethnic groups living in Yugoslavia could not discuss memories of World War II that could potentially stir up hate between them. According to this socialist narrative, it was the working class who had defeated the bourgeois, rather than the anti-Facist, primarily Serb Partizans<sup>5</sup> who defeated the Ustasa, or the Nazi proxy regime in Croatia, and the Serb nationalists or Cetniks (Ibid.). As a result of this common established narrative which did not allow space for the expression of victimhood for many people, scholars often attribute the collapse of Yugoslavia to the political manipulation of memories from World War II suppressed or simply not addressed (Ibid.). When political leaders in the region at the end of the 1980s and early 1990s began to unweave this national narrative and started making nationalist distinctions

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<sup>5</sup> The anti-Facist forces led by Josip Broz Tito who fought Nazi forces in the area of the former Yugoslavia during World War II

between the peoples of Yugoslavia, armed conflict broke out in the region leading to the collapse of this once unified, multiethnic state.

The war in Bosnia began on April 6, 1992, following a declaration of independence<sup>6</sup> from Yugoslavia (Bougarel 4). According to Hasan Nuhanovic's<sup>7</sup> *Under the UN Flag*, the ethnic cleansing<sup>8</sup> of eastern Bosnia by Bosnian Serb forces, specifically in the Drina river valley, which was then predominantly inhabited by Bosniaks, began in April-May of 1992 (Nuhanovic 27). On April 17, 1992, Bosnian Serb forces led by the Serbian Democratic Party (SDS) proclaimed a Serb government in the municipality of Bratunac, a neighboring municipality of Srebrenica. Around this same time, May of 1992, Army of Bosnia and Herzegovina forces led by Naser Oric<sup>9</sup> retook Srebrenica, causing Serbs in the area to flee across the Drina river to Serbia or to nearby Bratunac (Gregulska 7). Thousands of Bosniaks from surrounding villages and towns fled to Srebrenica in order to escape Bosnian Serb attacks (Ibid.). Srebrenica was during this time massively overcrowded and subject to daily shelling along with a lack of food, water, electricity and medicine (Ibid.). In early 1993, General Ratko Mladic (commander of the Bosnian Serb Army) deployed troops and artillery around the Srebrenica enclave (this included not only the town of Srebrenica, but also several villages) and slowly began to drive inward (Rieff 187). Attacking village after village, Mladic's troops had just reached the outskirts of the town of Srebrenica itself, when the UN stepped in and declared the enclave a UN "safe-haven" in April of 1993 (Ibid.). UNPROFOR (United Nations Protection Force) troops entered the

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<sup>6</sup> This declaration of independence did not take into consideration multiethnic interests, as Bosnian Serbs did not want to separate from the Serb populations of Serbia and Montenegro in Yugoslavia

<sup>7</sup> Hasan Nuhanovic is a survivor of the Srebrenica genocide and has worked extensively to hold the Dutch government legally responsible for the events which transcended in Srebrenica in July of 1995.

<sup>8</sup> The term used to refer to the terrorizing of Bosniak inhabitants living in the territories which Bosnian Serb forces were attempting to take over. Tactics often used to encourage Bosniak populations to leave these territories were murder, rape, forced starvation, and forced unemployment (Rieff, 1995, pg. 86).

<sup>9</sup> Naser Oric was convicted in March, 2003, of war crimes committed in the Srebrenica and Bratunac municipalities <http://www.icty.org/sid/8266>

enclave to protect civilians, who were at that point required to demilitarize by handing in their arms (Ibid.).

On July, 11, 1995, Mladic's forces entered Srebrenica. Despite the town's so-called "safe-haven" status, men and boys were separated from their families with the forced aid of UN peacekeeping soldiers. Some fled into the hills with intentions of reaching Bosniak-controlled Tuzla (approximately 100 kilometers from Srebrenica). Those who fell into the hands of the Bosnian Serbs were executed, and after a period of five days, it is estimated that over 8,000 Bosniak men and boys were massacred (Duijzings 1).

Officially ending the war in Bosnia, the Dayton Peace Agreement (Dayton) was signed in December, 1995. Dayton's creation of two entities, the Federation and Republika Srpska, only reaffirmed the territorialization of the three constituent peoples of Bosnia (Bošniaks/Muslims, Croats and Serbs) while also reaffirming the product of ethnic cleansing which took place during the war (Bougarel 6). Srebrenica is now located in Republika Srpska, and slowly, refugees have started to return home in spite of fear and limited economic prospects. Srebrenica is today a relatively poor and ethnically divided town, which does not at all correspond to the memories of the pre-war, flourishing and multiethnic Srebrenica.

### *Role of the Media*

In the wake of such atrocities, particularly those which were essentially overseen by the international community right in the heart of Europe, Srebrenica has over the past fifteen years often been the topic of international media coverage. This media coverage ranges from documentaries, to news stories, to editorial pieces, to programming specials. While motives and agendas may differ, each of these international media representatives is an outsider with the opportunity to help or harm people in the community of Srebrenica through both their working

processes in the town and finished product representations. Although I am interested in people's general opinions and perceptions regarding international media in Srebrenica, I am ultimately curious to find out if any local people consider international media presence here and subsequent reporting to have an impact on reconciliation processes in Srebrenica. After July 1995, Srebrenica has become the topic of highly publicized debate, and I am seeking to explore if this publicity and high amount of outside influence affect what could potentially be natural or "from below" reconciliation processes.

A text which explains in depth the politics of memory regarding Srebrenica is Ger Duijzings's chapter "Commemorating Srebrenica" in *The New Bosnian Mosaic*. Duijzings makes several excellent points as to how the commemoration of Srebrenica has caused this town to become a place of note for international attention. In the wake of its failure to act soon and efficiently enough in Bosnia during the war in the 1990s, hundreds of members of the international community, as represented by not only individual political leaders but also countless organizations, attend the annual commemoration. Duijzings contends that the commemoration, which takes place at the former Dutchbat<sup>10</sup> base in Potocari, serves as a way for the international community to ritually apologize for having allowed the massacre to occur. In fact, if it was not for the support of the international community, the memorial site in Potocari most likely would have never been erected (Duijzings 17). Therefore, the annual commemoration of Srebrenica does not only serve the Bosniak community in need of a place of mourning, but is also a place for what Duijzings calls "international consumption," (Duijzings 20).

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<sup>10</sup> *Dutchbat* is the name used to refer to the UNPROFOR battalion comprised of Dutch troops charged with protecting the civilians of Srebrenica from the period of February, 1994-July, 1995 (Nuhanovic 48)

The case study of Jedwabne, Poland provides an interesting comparison of a small town that very suddenly faced extraordinary amounts of outside attention, particularly from the Polish national and international media. Jedwabne is a town located in northeastern Poland with a population of approximately 2,000 (Wolentarska-Ochman 154). Like Srebrenica, Jedwabne would just be another small town had it not been for significant atrocities committed there during the World War II. Until the publication of Jan Tomasz Gross's book *Neighbors* in 2000, it had been largely agreed upon by Polish historians that the massacre in July 1941 of 1,600 of Jedwabne's Jews was carried out by Nazi forces after the town was taken from Soviet control (Wolentarska-Ochman 152). Gross, a Polish-born political scientist at New York University, challenged this narrative with extensive research revealing that in fact, it was the Poles in Jedwabne who rounded up the town's Jews into a barn and set the barn ablaze, not the Nazi troops (Ibid.). What followed was an intense national debate about Jewish-Polish relations during the war and a call to reexamine historical archives in order to establish a "true" narrative of what took place in Jedwabne in 1941 with the creation of the Institute of National Remembrance (Ibid.).

In addition to political actors, Jedwabne was also subject to constant media attention, which might have stimulated national debate and reexamination of Polish cultural values, but also caused personal damage to the people of Jedwabne. Ewa Wolentarska-Ochman shares a quote from Marta Kurkowska-Budzan, a Jedwabne-born historian, regarding the use of names and places in publications. Kurkowska-Budzan states that these names, for instance, while "non-material elements" for the journalists and academic scholars, correspond to emotions and social and familial relationships for the people of Jedwabne. These names and places resonate with individuals immediately in Jedwabne (Wolentarska-Ochman 159).

Wolentarska-Ochman goes on to discuss the “media ‘hunt’” for perpetrators and witnesses. Similar to the months leading up to the July 11 commemoration in Srebrenica-Potocari, domestic and international media representatives were swarming Jedwabne in the months leading up to the 60-year commemoration in July, 2001. The question remains, what is the impact, if any, of outside forces such as international media on reconciliation processes in post-conflict communities? As opposed to Srebrenica where Bosniaks have started returning to live, there remains only one Jewish woman in Jedwabne. There is, therefore, little to no interaction between Jews and Poles in the place where the atrocities occurred, whereas in Srebrenica Serbs and Bosniaks regularly interact with one another. Despite this lack of interaction in Jedwabne itself, this national discussion was pertinent to relations between Jewish and Polish communities around Poland and the world. The discussion that media prompted of taking collective responsibility for the events which took place in Jedwabne took a judgmental approach and caused the inhabitants of Jedwabne, those people really in need of reconciliation, to feel isolated from the rest of Polish society (Wolentarska-Ochman 160). One Polish journalist described the negative atmosphere in the town as these publicized debates continued. The people of Jedwabne, many of them who were born after the war or in other cities, felt embarrassed, angry and abandoned as the media continued publishing stories daily about the issue (Ibid). Perhaps the most important element of media effecting relations in the Jedwabne is what Wolentarska-Ochman identifies as a bipolarization of the opinions in the town. Media essentially portrayed inhabitants as either extremists or deniers, or as those who were not trustworthy as they sided with outsiders (Wolentarska-Ochman 161). Wolentarska-Ochman holds these outside actors responsible for disturbing community-based methods of remembering and community discourse about dealing with the past.

In response to Wolentarska-Ochman's arguments about Jedwabne, Slawomir Kapralski contends that the people of Jedwabne only actively deal with the past, that is discuss July, 1941, when asked to by a journalist or someone else seeking to tell this story (Kapralski 180). Kapralski classifies Wolentarska-Ochman's reference to Jedwabne's own memory processes as the development of myth rather than a genuine memory (Ibid.). He points out that rather than actively working to create a narrative about what happened in Jedwabne, the memory project which Wolentarska-Ochman refers to is really just the idea of a select few political leaders (Kapralski 185). While Wolentarska-Ochman blames the media for the bipolarization of Jedwabne, Kapralski argues that the town was already divided into a small group of people really looking to remember what happened and a majority of people who either did not care or were hostile to the idea of remembering. Kapralski maintains that in Jedwabne, there is no conscious memory work of what happened in 1941, it is instead an issue of forced discussion that perhaps outsiders have contributed by bringing to the forefront of national attention.

Another pertinent element to examining the effects of international media reporting is to look at the manner in which media represent the populations expected to reconcile, in this case, Bosniaks and Serbs. In major world publications (primarily Western publications) regarding the events of Srebrenica, Bosniaks are often portrayed as the only victims who suffered during the war. While numbers prove that Bosniaks did in fact encounter the highest number of casualties of the two groups, ethnic cleansing, and genocide, Serb victimhood is rarely addressed in international media coverage and furthermore, Serbs are often portrayed as war-mongering perpetrators of genocide.

In Phil Hammond and Edward S. Herman's *Degraded Capability: the Media and the Kosovo Crisis*, Mick Hume's chapter "Nazifying the Serbs, from Bosnia to Kosovo" discusses



the manner in which media in NATO-aligned countries have “demonized” the Serbs in the past two decades. Hume discusses that in a secular world that no longer likens something evil to the “devil,” the best way to demonize someone or something is to draw a comparison to the Nazis (Hume 71). In the case of both Bosnia and Kosovo, Hume contends that media have portrayed the Serbs as committing “another Holocaust” and a series of genocides against their neighbors. Hume provides several examples of Western politicians using variations of the word *genocide* to justify their involvement in the region, specifically in Kosovo (Hume 72). He also provides examples of Nazification of the Serbs in headlines in international news sources. Hume argues that the West insisted on using the term because of its moral implications (e.g., the moral need to intervene when concentration camps and genocide are occurring) and therefore moral justification of NATO’s war against Serbia (Hume 73). I find this source particularly pertinent because it discusses exactly the sort of problematic media portrayal that can lead to misinformed generalizations of an entire people. While Hume does focus more on Kosovo, I think this is still important because international perceptions of Serbs most likely have nothing to do with the location of Serbs or local context, be it south Serbia, Kosovo or Bosnia.

Duijzings concept of “international consumption” is exemplified by major world publications showing up in Srebrenica once a year— just in time for the July 11 commemoration. Marina Vujnovic discusses in her article, “The Blame Game: News Framing of the Srebrenica Massacre, 1993-1995,” her analysis of *New York Times* and *Washington Post* coverage of Srebrenica since the crimes began in 1993. My purpose for looking at this article remains to show at least one example of the problematic approaches to discussing Srebrenica in the media. In her study, Vujnovic discusses how she divided her data into two periods. The first period starts from the time in 1993 when the Srebrenica enclave was declared a UN safe area to the time

just before the fall of Srebrenica<sup>11</sup>; therefore from March 1993 to June 1995 (Vujnovic 36). The second period begins in July 1995 and ends with the ten-year commemoration in July 2005. I will primarily focus on the post-fall period as this is the time period most pertinent to my own research. In comparison to the first period's primary use of the term *ethnic cleansing* and blame placement on the Bosnian Serb forces, the second period analysis showed that while *New York Times* more often than *Washington Post*, both publications had started to use the word *genocide* in reference to Srebrenica (Vujnovic 40). As compared to her calculated 70.3% of blame attribution to the Bosnian Serbs and 16.2% of blame attribution to the international community in 1995, in 2005, Vujnovic calculated these same categories 21.4% and 51% respectively (Ibid.). Whereas in the first period Bosniak testimonies accounted for only 6% of sources for journalists working for these two publications, in the second period, Bosniak testimonies had grown to 24.57% of sources for news stories (Ibid.). Vujnovic points out that this not only indicates an increased access for journalists to eyewitnesses and victims in the second period, but also a subsequent shift in blame to the international community. According to her study results, the blame attribution change is directly related to Bosniaks placement of blame on the international community for genocide in Srebrenica.

This analysis leads me to ask about the factors that play in to these changes. With whom are these reporters talking? Are they talking to members of both Bosniak and Serb communities? What kinds of questions are they asking to produce such a high volume of stories about blame attribution? If the Bosniak community primarily blames the international community for the events which took place in Srebrenica in July, 1995, what role should the international community, particularly international media, now play in Srebrenica?

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<sup>11</sup> The term "fall of Srebrenica," as referred to by the Bosniaks and often the international community, is also referred to as the "liberation of Srebrenica" by the Serb population. (Duijzings 10).

## Methodology

In this section, I describe the process by which I was able to collect data to analyze some of the perceptions of international media in Srebrenica today. I first define what I mean by perception, and then discuss in detail my methodology process.

I define the word *perception* for the purposes of this research as an understanding acquired via sensory processes due to the presence of a stimulus. Taking into consideration this definition, I define this *understanding* as the opinion or impression of local people in Srebrenica regarding the international media. The articles or stories presented by international media that people read or watch, experiences that local people have with media, whether personal encounters such as interviews or photographs, or simply watching journalists and crews working in their town, is what I have identified as *sensory processes*. The *stimulus* therefore remains members and representatives of the international media and their subsequent reporting.

My methodology for data collection consisted of twelve semi-structured interviews with members of the Srebrenica community. Approval from UNC-CH's Institutional Review Board (IRB) was obtained before I interviewed both younger and older people, although because more young people in Srebrenica speak English than older people, I had significantly more young people in my sample. Also, because more young people speak English, they also have increased access to international media; however, despite access, each of my interviewees maintained his/her own perception of the international media. I also had an ethnic balance of Bosniak and Serb interviewees. Using the "snowball sampling method" I obtained further interviews by asking for recommendations from my interviewees. I interviewed members of the community who work for state institutions, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and those unaffiliated

with either. I was hoping to have interviews with someone from the Memorial Center<sup>12</sup> and from one of the victim organizations, such as the Mothers of Srebrenica and Zepa Enclaves; however neither would meet with me. I understood this as a reflection of the fact that many people here are tired of international students and researchers who come to Srebrenica to conduct interviews.

With the help of my academic advisor, I developed a list of interview questions. To ensure the comparability of the interviews, I did not alter the questions based on the person with whom I spoke. Therefore, age, ethnicity and other potential variables did not have any impact on the questions I chose to ask my interviewees. I did, however, add one additional question for those individuals who work for institutions and NGOs.<sup>13</sup> Each interviewee filled out a consent form, which provided information about the study, the option to remain anonymous, as well as the option not to answer any question which they did not feel comfortable answering. If the interviewee preferred to conduct the interview in local language, an interpreter was present and these interviewees received a translated copy of the consent form.

### *Limitations of the Study*

My inability to speak the local language of course limited my options for interviews. With a fairly limited choice of trusted interpreters, scheduling was at times difficult and therefore limited interviewee prospects. Although I had nothing but complete confidence in my interpreter, it would have been an ever better experience to hear and understand the answers myself.

Though I understand that many people in Srebrenica are exhausted with giving interviews to internationals, it was somewhat frustrating that I was unable to meet with anyone from the

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<sup>12</sup> Memorial Center (Potocari Memorial Center) is the official state-sponsored memorial of the Srebrenica genocide located at the former Dutchbat base (a converted battery factory) (Duijzings, 2007, pg. 6)

<sup>13</sup> I asked these individuals if there is an employee at the institution for whom they work who regularly monitors international media, specifically international media coverage regarding Srebrenica

Memorial Center or from one of the victims' organizations. Their exposure to and experience with international media could have provided me with interesting data for analysis. I am however satisfied to have had the chance to speak to several people who did not have prepared answers as a result of much interview experience. Since about half of my interviewees had not been interviewed before by international media representatives, I was able to collect non-routine or "fresh" answers to analyze.

Another limitation was the time constraint of the independent study project portion of the program. Only having four weeks to complete interviews and the paper was difficult as there was more I would have liked to do with my time in Srebrenica and with my research project. I had planned to add to my methodology a discourse analysis, where I would have analyzed several major world publication articles for examples of problematic and positive elements discussed in my interviews. I did not, however, have enough time. And of course, I would have loved to spend more time in Srebrenica talking with members of the community not only about topics related to my project, but also about life today in Srebrenica.

### *Biases*

Finally, although I always explained that I was seeking information pertaining to the international media, I think I often received answers when people had local media in mind. Though I cannot be sure of this, it seemed like many times interviewees based the answers to my questions on their impressions and experiences of Bosnian media. This is probably an indication of the fact that there is little distinction between media, and that international or domestic, interviewees formed their perceptions based on that with which they are most familiar.

## Interview Analysis

In this section, I highlight the primary topics which arose in my interviews. It is important to note that while many, and even all in some cases, of my interviewees shared the same opinions about certain things, in other cases, each had different opinions. As I have only collected the opinions of twelve of Srebrenica's residents, it is impossible to draw generalizations about these particular issues. I present their comments and my own analysis of their opinions as it relates to my literature review.

### *Srebrenica=Genocide*

Srebrenica is often described as the site of the worst war atrocities in Europe since World War II. And indeed, it is. However, this town's equation with genocide, while continually perpetrated by both politicians and many residents alike, was consistently a response to my question about perceptions of Srebrenica's presentation by the international media.

"Srebrenica is a world symbol. Unfortunately, at this moment, the focus of media is about Srebrenica as a victim of genocide, the city a victim of genocide and its people," stated Du<sup>14</sup> (Du, 2010). It is important to note that even a high-ranking official in Srebrenica's municipality like Du believes Srebrenica is only a place of such great media attention for one reason.

"Now Srebrenica is like a souvenir," O remarked (O, 2010). O's comment reflects Duijzings's opinion that Srebrenica is in fact a place for "international consumption." As international politicians pour into Srebrenica for the commemoration in July, media representatives from their respective countries often attend the ceremony to document the presence of these political leaders at such a significant ceremony. Interviewees explained that

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<sup>14</sup> In the interview analysis section, all interviewees' confidentiality will be protected through the use of initials, rather than names.

while they understand Srebrenica's significance because of what took place here in 1995, they feel that this town today has more potential for positive media coverage.

“When you say Srebrenica, you know what it means. Potocari. That's it,” Sa said (Sa, 2010).

B made an interesting point concerning the meaning of a statement like Sa's. She pointed out that often times journalists and other internationals do not even make it to the actual town of Srebrenica. They come in (from the western side of the municipality, presumably from Sarajevo) and go to Memorial Center in Potocari, and then after the commemoration, return to Sarajevo (B, 2010).

Interviewees reiterated that this town is flooded with foreign media once a year, for the July 11 commemoration ceremony. If they come at other times of the year, they typically still only go to Potocari and are only interested in writing stories pertaining to July, 1995. N shared with me one experience she had with a journalist. This journalist worked for the *New York Times* and wanted to write a story about the Youth Center in Srebrenica. N explained how the journalist contacted her with her plans to come for the July 11 commemorations and to also show that despite what happened in Srebrenica, young people are still working together for a better future (N, 2010).

“I was so angry. Just so angry,” N stated (Ibid). It seems to her that foreign journalists are always trying to link a random story about life in Srebrenica to the commemoration. She described her frustration with this situation, because she lives in Srebrenica 365 days a year. If people are really interested to talk about, for instance, the work that young people are doing in Srebrenica, they can come to Srebrenica at any other time (Ibid). This statement does not necessarily indicate any sort of resentment toward the annual commemoration, but rather a sort

of dissatisfaction with a lack of understanding that many people in Srebrenica are genuinely trying to move forward and make their town known for something other than those things which occurred in the past.

Another one of my interviewees expressed this same opinion. Si shared that journalists do not want to separate any of their stories from the commemoration (Si, 2010). I am aware of the fact that if the *New York Times* ran a story entitled “Youth Center in Srebrenica Works for a New Beginning,” a fair amount of readers would not have any clue as to the significance of a youth organization working in a small town in Bosnia without any contextual background information. The point N and Si made is that journalists could choose to provide the necessary background information without linking their stories to the July 11 ceremony.

Other interviewees maintained that international media play a vital function in making sure those responsible, namely the international community, do not forget their failures regarding Srebrenica. Dm explained media should talk about human losses in Srebrenica, because people here still struggle with the fact that there were people who let those events take place (Dm, 2010). International media help to hold the international community responsible for Srebrenica. This exemplifies Vujnovic’s point that the Bosniak population of the Srebrenica municipality has indeed begun to place blame on the international community.

### *The Zoo Effect*

As Wolentarska-Ochman explains about the inhabitants of Jedwabne, many of my interviewees expressed feelings of being trapped. While many inhabitants of Srebrenica have apartments in Sarajevo, Tuzla and other places in the region, many people do not have the option to go somewhere else. This is their home, and many feel they cannot leave. They are therefore passively subject to live in an environment regularly frequented by outsiders, especially media.



One interviewee explained that whereas before the war Srebrenica was a place for tourism due to its natural beauty, it is now a place for war or memorial tourism. None of my interviewees expressed particular resentment for the international media, because they said they understand the significance of Srebrenica's recent history and thus attraction for media attention. Some of them nevertheless feel their space is regularly invaded by people who come, stay for a few days and assume they know everything about Srebrenica, and then leave.

N described that sometimes she feels like she lives in a museum, or in a box. Many people come and go, but she stays in Srebrenica (N, 2010). Interestingly enough, N has twice been offered opportunities to leave Srebrenica, and Bosnia for that matter, yet she chooses to stay here (Ibid). Srebrenica is not only the place she calls home, but she also believes she has much work to do here. Despite many people's efforts to preserve this town's status as a solely place of victimhood, N says she wants to inspire life here and does not want her future to be dictated by the past (Ibid).

The concept of preserving Srebrenica as it was in the immediate post-war years is an issue that a few interviewees raised during our discussions. Often international media speak to representatives of organizations whose occupations are to essentially safeguard July, 1995, as Srebrenica's emblem.

Some people take the opportunity of a meeting with a representative of the international media to try to change their town's status as a place tragic victimhood.

"I am happy to see any journalists coming, because I feel like what I need to do is to represent Srebrenica in a different way," M shared (M, 2010).

She knows that journalists are usually looking for stories about people in Srebrenica still in conflict, stories about how Bosniaks and Serbs cannot live together here. The information she

shares with them is very different from what she assumes they expect to hear, and she noted that she can even see the surprised looks on their faces when she tells journalists that life here is normal. In doing this, M explained that she is also challenging those organizations who would want to portray Srebrenica differently, particularly those who would like to preserve its immediate post-war atmosphere (Ibid).

### *No Agency*

Several interviewees described examples of occasions where they question their own security in Srebrenica because of something published in international media. Similarly to Jedwabne, local residents are subject to outside opinions, which would suggest that those who do not live here know better about conditions in Srebrenica. The international media perpetuate this feeling of a lack of agency for people living in Srebrenica.

“I am not afraid here. But when I watch the news, I get scared of where I live,” B said. She elaborated by saying that the picture that media present is so much more dramatic than it actually is in Srebrenica (B, 2010). Interviewees discussed how journalists typically ask people about the security situation in Srebrenica, and are even looking to portray it as a dangerous place.

“That’s a stupid question. It’s typical,” O said (O, 2010).

M explained that Srebrenica is probably one of the safest places in Bosnia, and yet people here are made to feel it is dangerous by the media (M, 2010). This is the same action by outsiders as in Jedwabne that creates a further lack of agency for people in the Srebrenica community.

### *Why Does No One Discuss . . . Perceived Lack of Economic Development?*

As mentioned in the literature review, Srebrenica was once a flourishing town with a bright future for further economic development. Every single person I interviewed shared with

me his/her frustration with the fact that Srebrenica's economic development is ignored, and that this could potentially be the focus of international media attention. A high amount of unemployment in the town makes it difficult to attract people, especially those who left during the war. Additionally, interviewees raised questions about the spending of both domestic and international funds intended to further develop Srebrenica.

Dm explained that one of the key elements of refugee return to Srebrenica would be improvement of the employment situation (Dm, 2010). She also thinks that this would improve relations between the Serb and Bosniak communities in Srebrenica, because if life here was easier economically, there would more likely be peaceful coexistence (Ibid). Although she maintains that nationalist tensions will always be present here since the past is undoable, economic development could potentially help to ease the tension (Ibid).

Another aspect of economic development about which interviewees expressed concern is the accountability of money invested in Srebrenica, particularly by the international community. Ic frustratingly asked why the media have no interest in investigating why, fifteen years after the war, Srebrenica still looks the way it does (Ic, 2010). However, contrary to what some interviewees said, M stated that in her opinion much of the money that has been sent here has been spent properly. Compared to how Srebrenica looked there is progress here when you compare it now to after the war, it looks like a new town (M, 2010). Despite which of these opinions is accurate, these are potential topics for international media coverage regarding the economic situation in Srebrenica.

According to Se, international development programs in Srebrenica are not only somewhat questionable regarding spending, but also concerning the types of development they encourage (Se, 2010). Whereas mining and tourism were Srebrenica's primary sources of

income before the war, international development programs now encourage agricultural means of development (Ibid). He explained that people here were not farmers, and that by giving someone livestock, they are forced to learn a new trade that is not historically relevant to Srebrenica's economic development (Ibid).

J made an interesting point regarding economic development in Srebrenica. She explained that people rarely remember that in light of the socialist economic system, before the war, Yugoslavia had a planned economy. According to her, it is therefore difficult to estimate how tourism, mining and factories previously in Srebrenica would have fared in the post-war, market economy structure (J, 2010).

#### *Why Does No One Discuss . . . Positive Stories?*

All of my interviewees believed there is not enough positive coverage of their town. Supporting their points, they told me stories about friendships between Serbs and Bosniaks, before, during and after the war, none of which were ever interesting to international media. Events such as festivals or conferences that take place in Srebrenica rarely receive international attention, and interviewees indicated their understanding that stories such as these do not sell. M told me that young people in Srebrenica frequently try to organize cultural events and often encounter much difficulty because media are not interested to publish positive stories about Srebrenica (M, 2010).

“It's not interesting for journalists to write about a Serb and a Bosniak having coffee together. That doesn't sell,” O shared with me (O, 2010). Ic stated a similar statement and added that an ethnic dispute between residents here would of course be much more newsworthy (Ic, 2010).

O also explained that in trying to obtain positive stories, journalists could ask questions about the future (O, 2010). Even if people did not necessarily have positive responses, at least then journalists would have a real gauge of the situation in Srebrenica based on people's responses to questions about the future (Ibid). The general consensus among interviewees was that if international media did not always want to focus on the events of the past in Srebrenica, they would be more easily able to find positive stories to represent this town differently.

"They should show today. The past is the past, we live for the future," K said (K, 2010).

#### *Questions of Objectivity: Preconceived Notions and Length of Stay*

According to several interviewees, it seems to them that journalists already have their stories in mind when they come to Srebrenica. While I am not so naïve as to say there is ever such a thing as complete objectivity, having an open mind regarding potential findings is a crucial aspect of journalistic professionalism. Interviewees shared with me that they do not understand the point of traveling so far, when every story looks as one interviewee described, "like it was cut and pasted." Interviewees explained that international media simply repeat themselves in their stories about Srebrenica, as they are not in fact looking to present a new story.

"They come with the story in their heads. They just need confirmation. A few photos, a few people to talk to," Ic stated. "It's nothing like journalism," (Ic, 2010).

Of course when coming to Srebrenica, journalists know what happened here. That does not excuse professional complacency. As Si put it, coming to Srebrenica is not like coming to the site of a car accident. It is not a matter of simply collecting facts, because nearly every "fact" here is disputed (Si, 2010). The events which took place during the war were traumatic for each

person here, regardless of ethnicity, age or position. Therefore, it is essential to come to Srebrenica with the closest thing to an unbiased position and open mind.

Additionally, international journalists often do not spend enough time in Srebrenica to have the chance to disprove their preconceived ideas. They come for two, maybe three days and typically only during the July commemorations. All but one of the interviewees expressed this opinion, but J thinks about it slightly differently. She made the point that maybe coming here and just obtaining a glance is the best way to gain genuine perspective of Srebrenica (J, 2010).

*Questions of Objectivity: With Whom Do International Media Representatives Speak?*

According to several of my interviewees, when journalists come to Srebrenica they often speak to the same four or five people. All interviewees noted that it is difficult for journalists to objectively report on Srebrenica when they do not stay here long enough and they speak with those same people every time.

“They talk to the same people. They are recommended by others in the field and they just talk with the same people. There is no opportunity to see the other side,” Se said (Se, 2010). When I asked him to elaborate on the ‘other side,’ he told me he was referring to the Serb side (Ibid). One cannot be so naïve as to think only one side suffered during war, and journalists who come here rarely consult any of the Serb population.

*Questions of Objectivity: Are You a Bosniak or a Serb?*

Two of my interviewees shared with me that the first question they have been asked when speaking to representatives of the international media was, “Are you a Bosniak or a Serb?”

“Then they change their questions based on your answer,” Si stated (Si, 2010).

Though not all, most of the Serbs I interviewed explained that in general, media coverage of Srebrenica is typically one-sided. They consider the lack of acknowledgment of Serb

victimhood and even portrayal of Serbs as continually a source of violence in Srebrenica as commonplace in international media. Ic provided me with an example of a July 11 commemoration ceremony in Potocari when a group of people was waving Islamic flags and shouting things that she considered completely irrelevant to the commemoration (Ic, 2010). The next day, July 12, which is the commemoration day for Serbs in the Srebrenica municipality, a group of young people was waving Serbian flags and shouting, “This is Serbia!” She explained that only the latter received international attention, whereas the first did not.

Validating Hume’s position on the Nazification of Serbs in the media, Ic told me that journalists are searching for some young people, “looking like Nazis,” demonstrating this kind of behavior (Ic, 2010). She recounted a memory of an Italian journalist who came to Srebrenica and stayed for a few days, socializing with both Bosniaks and Serbs in his time here (Ibid). Ic’s impression of him was very positive, and she perceived him to be a very open-minded person. After he left, he sent her the link from the story he wrote about his time in Srebrenica. Pictured in his article was an armed man in military fatigues, described as a Serb fighter (Ibid). Also pictured was a group of children demonstrating what is perceived to be a Serb nationalistic hand signal. Ic could not believe that this man thought himself to be an objective journalist, and that he had portrayed Serbs in this way, while perpetuating the notion that Srebrenica is a dangerous place today (Ibid). Further, she expressed her repulsion with the fact that he had manipulated children for the purpose of his story (Ibid).

“What I have seen is the Serbian nation represented as guilty, and Muslims as the only victims,” said N (N, 2010). I would like to assume that someone reading an article about the wars in Bosnia would know that in all wars, casualties occur on all sides. And in Bosnia, it was sadly an immense amount of civilian casualties on all sides.

### *Do International Media Even Matter?*

My final question in each interview was to find out if the interviewee thought international media reporting on Srebrenica has any impact on reconciliation processes in Srebrenica. In most cases, interviewees demonstrated a fairly indifferent attitude. Most stated a general lack of access to international media prevents most people from thinking one way or the other about the issue. A few people did not answer this way, and stated that if a person really wanted to, there are opportunities, such as free internet in the town library, to read international media. However, if a person does not speak any foreign languages, options are limited.

Dm expressed that in some cases, international media play a positive role. Media have the opportunity to influence political leaders (she was referring primarily to the European Union) and the decisions they then make regarding Bosnia and eventually Srebrenica (Dm, 2010). She talked about the resolution which was just passed in the European Parliament, and the positive position she believe media had, because depending on which media they see, this could heavily influence their decision-making (Ibid). This is what J described as only an indirect impact on reconciliation (J, 2010). However, as far as a direct impact, Dm said that most people in Srebrenica will not typically be exposed to international media coverage. She is therefore unsure of their impact on reconciliation processes in Srebrenica (Dm, 2010).

B explained that international media cannot in any way contribute to reconciliation processes if they only present one side. She went on to say that media should be discussing that both Bosniaks and Serbs had losses during the war, and now they have to live in Srebrenica together (B, 2010).



## Conclusions

This research has most importantly shown that the people of Srebrenica perceive their town to be of significance for reasons other than war crimes committed in the recent wars of the 1990s. International media often ignore current issues in Srebrenica, continually writing stories about the past while reducing the town to genocide. This is frustrating for many people in Srebrenica who are trying to create a new atmosphere in the town and who are trying to get back to what some interviewees referred to as “normalcy.” While none of my interviewees in any way diminished the tragic events which took place in Srebrenica, each demonstrated the desire for a better future for Srebrenica. Expressing their willingness to see more positive coverage of Srebrenica, interviewees shared many topics which could potentially be of interest for international media.

As pointed out by several interviewees, the short lengths of time journalists spend in Srebrenica causes questions of the objectivity regarding the international media. Several interviewees recommended that perhaps journalists could spend an extended trip in the town, and this would help them to obtain a more comprehensive picture of Srebrenica. Interviewees explained that two or three days in Srebrenica is not at all enough time to understand the complexity of this town’s history or present situation. However, one must also question the reality of this recommendation. While they would have more opportunities to talk with people, particularly with people who the media do not repeatedly seek after, journalists work with deadlines and are not sent to places to stay for great lengths of time. It is unlikely most journalists would have the opportunity to spend longer periods of time in Srebrenica; they could, however, adjust some other elements of objectivity.

Representatives of other forms of media such as documentaries, television specials, or magazines are more likely to have the time to spend longer than news houses, but there still remains the issue of the fact that international media representatives seem to be coming with preconceptions. Though Srebrenica should not be a special topic when it comes to journalistic ethics, interviews demonstrated the importance of abandoning preconceived notions in order to as objectively as possible listen to people. Predominantly exposing Bosniak opinions, international media are clearly not taking all means to discuss objectively the complexity of Srebrenica, past and present. As the “Are you a Serb or Bosniak?” question exemplifies, journalists in some cases enforce ethnic identities when it might be an element of someone’s personhood with which he/she does not regularly identify.

According to the research, international media also display a poor sense of objectivity by choosing to continually interviewing the same few people in Srebrenica. The issue of international media seeking out the same people in the Srebrenica community also brings attention to the issue of a lack of agency some interviewees expressed. By choosing to speak to certain people, the international media creates spokespeople for the community. Therefore, only a few residents dictate the image of Srebrenica media then disseminated to the rest of the world. Interviewees expressed they are in a sense being talked about, and are left with no power to correct information they maintain is inaccurate or poorly-representative of Srebrenica. Though likely unaware, international media are thus diminishing other residents’ opinions and experiences, which could be of value to innovative, more representative stories.

The question yet remains, taking all of these factors into consideration, what do people in Srebrenica perceive is the impact of international media on reconciliation processes in their town? The general consensus established that international media neither have a positive nor

negative impact, but rather complex, mixed opinions. Negative elements including the reduction of Srebrenica to genocide, questionable objectivity and the perpetuation of a lack of agency among residents are clearly problematic elements of media presence in and coverage of Srebrenica that have the potential to disturb local reconciliation processes. Despite the negative effects of international media, interviewees also provided their opinions of constructive contributions of the international media.

Interviewees did not rule out the possibility for international media to have a positive role in reconciliation processes in Srebrenica. Most notably, interviewees shared that international media could investigate more than one national narrative. Media should also make themselves aware of the fact that even within so-called national or ethnic groups, there is room for more than one narrative. According to Duijzings, it is unrealistic to expect one narrative of the past to develop in Srebrenica, or in Bosnia for that matter (Duijzings 166). Instead, there must be public space for people to share their various narratives and memories of the past. An ideal situation would be that in which the international media aid in providing this public space needed for various narratives to be expressed. Instead of taking simply one side of the story, international media could talk to several people from different ethnic groups to present the story of Srebrenica according to the memory and opinions of more than a few people.

Though not completely surprising to me as I had previously discussed this with my academic advisor, this research revealed that although each interviewee had perceptions, opinions and perceptions of the international media, many people feel that the local media are more of a hindrance to reconciliation processes in Srebrenica than international media. The fact that access to international media sources is more limited is undoubtedly a component of this perception. Another element of this perception remains that many people attribute major

responsibility for the recent war to local media's manipulative and divisive programming. One interviewee explained that it is in the interest of domestic media in Bosnia to preserve the immediate post-war conditions in Bosnia, and that includes the fresh animosity between ethnic groups. Political allegiances of proprietors and executives largely influence domestic media, and all interviewees explained that media are hindering the rebuilding of trust between people in Bosnia.

Although the international media have neither a negative nor positive impact on reconciliation processes in Srebrenica, domestic Bosnian media is in fact perceived to be the issue of greater importance. As anticipated by interviewees, this will only be an increasing problem for reconciliation processes in Bosnia if media continue to polarize communities. However, if they take the initiative, both international media and domestic media could potentially play a more positive role in making space for the development of more than one narrative and thus potential eased reconciliation in Srebrenica and in Bosnia. This establishment of space for public discourse regarding victimhood is vital to reconciliation processes in order for both communities and individuals to feel that their expressions of memories, opinions, and experiences are valuable to the creation of a brighter future in Bosnia.

#### *Recommendations for Further Study*

In several of my interviews, interviewees expressed that domestic media in Bosnia is a much larger problem in regards to disturbing reconciliation processes in Srebrenica. Although I had been made aware of this before starting my study, I knew that I would have my own limitations to investigating this topic. Do to my inability to speak the local language and therefore inability to read and watch Bosnian news programming without the aid of an interpreter, I could not have properly analyzed domestic media. I have found, however, that

many people perceive this as a growing problem needing to be addressed. Much work has been done regarding this topic in Rwanda, since as in many post-conflict societies, the domestic media in place after the conflict are the same who participated in pre-conflict propaganda dissemination and pitting communities against one another. I think it would be vital and contributing research to look at the manner in which domestic media in Bosnia contribute to further divisions among ethnic lines. One of the interviewees actually referenced a European Academy report regarding the growing ethno-mobilization in Bosnian media. The report discusses that media are more and more encouraging division among ethnic communities and that more and more people prefer to watch and read media which is ethnically-aligned. Interesting research might be to look at perceptions of this dividing media and the way in which it impacts post-conflict communities in Bosnia, particularly in communities such as Srebrenica where populations are mixed.

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## Appendix

1. How long have you lived in Srebrenica?
2. Do you regularly monitor any forms of international media including regional media (Croatian, Serbian and Montenegrin)?
3. Have you ever had a personal encounter with a member of the international media (an interview, quick statement, video clip etc.)?
4. How do you think Srebrenica is represented in the media?
5. Is international media reporting of Srebrenica objective?
6. What do you feel are the dominant topics and questions concerning Srebrenica that are covered by the international media today?
7. Are there any other topics concerning Srebrenica which you feel are important and that should receive more attention?
8. Do you get the impression that international media representatives are prepared when they come to Srebrenica? (background knowledge, contextual information regarding the current situation)
9. What is the impact of the international media, if any, on local reconciliation processes in Srebrenica?