

# 1 Introduction

## *Intervention and Its Meanings*

**T**HE COLUMN OF TREKKERS STRETCHED BACK FOR MILES AS the Peace March (*Marš mira*) began to enter the town of Potočari in the late afternoon of July 10, 2010. Arriving on the eve of the fifteenth anniversary of the Srebrenica genocide, some 7,000 marchers gathered at the Srebrenica-Potočari Memorial and Cemetery established in 2000 at the site of the Dutch battalion's base.<sup>1</sup> Their journey traced in reverse the hasty and terrifying exodus of 15,000 Bosniak (Bosnian Muslim) men and boys who had fled as violence approached the United Nations "safe area" of Srebrenica in 1995.<sup>2</sup> For the sixth year in a row, the Peace Marchers had spent three days retracing the steps of the column, remembering those who died en route and those who were captured and killed when Srebrenica fell to Bosnian Serb and Serbian military forces.

Like standard bearers, many of the marchers announced their sympathies with their arrival: some wrapped themselves in the blue and yellow Bosnian national flag. Others bore an earlier version, the flag of the short-lived Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina with its blue and white fleur de lis, signaling their allegiance to the state that the international community had recognized at the beginning of the war in 1992. Clusters of trekkers wore t-shirts designed for the occasion and carried their own regional flags. They represented miners from Kladanj, survivors from Vlasenica, the "Association of Life Bihać," and other communities. The march's eclectic assemblage included scores of foreigners as well. Bright red and

white Turkish flags dotted the crowd. Other international participants – Italian, Dutch, Canadian, American, Japanese – were less explicit in their self-identification, though here and there national colors appeared on a cap or backpack. Green flags, some with Arabic script, broadcast a political affinity with other members of the Muslim faith. A small but vocal minority attempted to interject a religious ardor into the commemoration, but it was unwelcome to many, including the organizers.

At the Srebrenica-Potočari Memorial and Cemetery, the weary trekkers were met with the quiet calm that had set in among the crowd assembled to greet them. The weight of the accomplishment hung in the air. There were no joyous embraces or jubilant cries, no celebrations. Rather, it was a somber event, the first part of a collective effort that would take place over the next twenty-four hours at the commemorative center to remember the victims of the Srebrenica genocide: the over 8,000 men and boys, “those who didn’t make it” (*oni koji nisu došli*). The marchers had led the way; through their movement, repeated each year since 2005, they made sacred the path of the 1995 column, recalling the suffering of those who walked before them.

The *Marš mira*, the Peace March to Potočari is, we argue, an intervention into a postwar society. An intervention may seek to interrupt and alter; to repair and restore; to reconstitute social relations in the aftermath of violence. Important to this study, interventions can engage and empower people. On a most fundamental, material level, the trek alters spaces. It brings people who otherwise would never travel that route, certainly not by foot, into territory that has purposely been ignored and left unmarked by the perpetrators of the crimes of July 1995. The marchers draw attention – if only temporarily – to sites that have specific associations with those crimes, and to their victims. In doing so, the march, its organizers, participants, and supporters assert authority over the past by activating a landscape; through this movement, they craft a narrative of victimhood and suffering that directly challenges the dominant discourse of Bosnian Serb officials and much of the Bosnian Serb public in the region.

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This book is about how communities and individuals respond to violent conflict and the specific effects of genocide. In it, we attempt to understand interventions like the Peace March that are aimed at altering social relations in the aftermath of violence. We argue that intervention exists not as a single, emblematic act but as a field of interconnected activity that continues to affect postwar communities long after violence has ended. The Peace March draws much of its meaning and power from its destination at the memorial center and the territory it covers; so, too, can other forms of interventions best be understood in relation to one another. The *Marš mira* is a three-day journey of remembrance organized by a select group of advocates and survivors interested in accounting for a specific past but, more importantly, it is an event inextricably bound to policies of refugee return, the role of the diaspora, the establishment of the memorial center, juridical proceedings, and continuing attempts at denial. These seemingly disparate mechanisms are intertwined; their successes and failures directly depend on one another.

In the chapters that follow, we argue that interventions are never simply externally driven, top-down policies that are disembodied from the experiences of everyday life. On the contrary, they derive from the complex and at times messy intersection of policy, practice, and social movements; they come into being, are negotiated and, above all, felt, in the circumstances of “ordinary” life as well as in those of extraordinary activism. Interventions, furthermore, have agents driving and caught up within them: recognizable political backers, financial sponsors, inspirational figures, strident opponents and, at their center, the people who participate in and face the consequences of these acts of change, protest, reform, and commemoration. This book is primarily about such people. Our particular focus is on the community of Srebrenica survivors. Examining the intricate and interdependent field of intervention, not just individual policies or practices, sheds light on the remarkable but frequently overlooked influence that these survivors have had. Too often such individuals are viewed – by members of the local elite, media, international community, and occasionally academia – as merely supporting players or

as an uneducated and manipulated population. They are, in fact, the very people, many of them women, whose lives have been most affected by the violence and who must still deal with its legacy day in and day out.<sup>3</sup> Be it through the prism of gender or generation, rural or urban sensibilities, ethnoreligious or ethnopolitical orientations or any combination thereof, differing expectations of social repair thus color intervention at its various scales. For all of these reasons, their experiences demand further analysis.<sup>4</sup>

By exploring the complexities of these interventions, their impetuses and effects, and the network of people engaged in their implementation, we focus on under-examined aspects of post-conflict societies, namely, the consequences of how organizing themselves for interventions have empowered individuals and communities, and thus yielded subtle, positive effects of social repair. Overlooked by analysts and policy makers assessing the higher profile “grand gestures” of redress, these more muted outcomes tell an important tale. They demonstrate the need for appreciating individual agency, historical context, and cultural specificity in any attempts at postwar social reconstruction after the annihilating effects of genocide.<sup>5</sup>

### Conceptualizing Intervention

Social scientists and political leaders have long grappled with the question of how societies deal with change. In the context of foreign policy and the study of nation-states, they have considered how societies respond to change brought about by violent rupture, such as wars of aggression, civil wars, and armed conflict in its many forms. Contemplating the causes and conditions of violence, scholars and policy makers recognize that contemporary societies never exist or act in isolation: just as members of a social group are enmeshed in the social relations of their community, so too are societies embedded in a network of geopolitical relations. The question of how societies respond to conflict, therefore, begins even before the violence ends, and addresses not only the state in which that violence is

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taking place but also actors in the international community, such as other states, international institutions, and non-governmental organizations. This latter point – external actors entangled in the violence and its aftermath – raises a related question: what exactly constitutes this rhetorically cohesive entity called the “international community?” Throughout this volume we refer to the aggregation of international institutions, organizations, and personnel involved in wartime and postwar Bosnia as the “international community” (*međunarodna zajednica*), acknowledging the term’s shortcomings in capturing the complexities of what anthropologist Stef Jansen describes as a “conglomerate of intervening actors.”<sup>6</sup> It is a term nevertheless firmly nested in the lexicon of postwar Srebrenica and the various forms of internationally sponsored interventionism. Invoked by activists, local politicians, and the media, its conflation of diverse actors and interests into a single undifferentiated grouping conveys the widespread perception that external, often coercive, forces dictate the terms of postwar Bosnia’s rehabilitation.<sup>7</sup>

Wartime action or inaction by these international actors does set the tone and pattern for postwar intervention. What happens during war shapes what happens afterward. In the case of Srebrenica, the lack of intervention during the war and the moral paralysis of those members of the international community charged with protecting its civilians create the context for postwar intervention. Many attempts at repair and redress thus reflect the international community’s sense of obligation to a people and place utterly failed by the “outside world” and specifically by the UN peacekeeping mission; their interventions flow from the consequences of that inaction both within and beyond Bosnia’s borders.

The term “intervention” itself merits further explanation: what do we mean by it, and how has it been used as an analytical tool in the study of other post-conflict societies? On the macro level – from international relations to development studies – analyses of international intervention assess the impetuses and mechanisms for redress, accountability, and social reconstruction used in successful or failed attempts at nation-building or rebuilding and rehabilitation.<sup>8</sup> Following this logic, much

of the scholarship on post-conflict societies has focused on the efficacy of various tools in the international tool kit at achieving their stated goals of redress and reform. In the social sciences, different fields have framed their respective analyses of this notion of intervention along relatively narrow disciplinary tracks, and many works examine these mechanisms in isolation from one another.<sup>9</sup> Although important exceptions have emerged from critiques of humanitarianism and development, less attention has been paid to the ideological and the normative presumptions underlying these mechanisms, such as the Western liberal ideals of political organization and action, views of the nature of violence, and expectations of the capacity of the international community and its proxies to craft functional, stable states that can be made ready to join their “family of nations.”<sup>10</sup>

This study employs a more holistic view of intervention, recognizing formal and informal actions, and the myriad of people – elite and average citizen, diaspora member, and international policy maker – involved in the activities surrounding postwar Srebrenica and postwar Bosnia. It follows these patterns of intervention over time, from the immediate aftermath to the longer-term efforts at redress. As we use the term, intervention entails actions as diverse as the 2007 failed initiative to give Srebrenica a special political status in Bosnia, to annual fundraising events in St. Louis, Missouri, to ongoing international documentation efforts, congressional and parliamentary resolutions, and micro-financing in the postwar municipality through the UN Development Program (UNDP). All of these are efforts to grapple with the consequences of genocide, on different scales and through different means. In considering these various political and social forms of engagement, we focus less on completed interventions than on the processes of intervening – that is, the processes of repairing lives and communities, of producing knowledge and countering lies, of reconstituting social relations.

The word “to intervene,” from Latin roots *inter* + *venire*, means to come between. Physically, it implies motion – entrance into a space – and

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through that entrance, separation: something that comes to occupy the space between two entities and thus to separate them. For example, as the *Marš mira* column entered the Srebrenica-Potočari Memorial and Cemetery on July 10, it marched between crowds of people gathered in welcome, and then between the gateposts of the memorial center. The Center itself, overwhelmingly a Bosniak memorial, lies in a valley between the hills of Republika Srpska (RS). Metaphorically, the march interrupts the predominantly Bosnian Serb spaces of Eastern Bosnia, if only for a brief period each year, and the center constitutes a permanent memorial to the victims of the Army of Republika Srpska-led program of expulsion and extermination set in the middle of what is now Bosnian Serb-governed territory.

To intervene can also have a temporal meaning; the intervening passage of time creates new possibilities as the past recedes further and further from the present. Intervening years separate the crimes from their judicial reckoning; they separate a family member's final glimpse of her loved one from the moment she kneels beside his marked grave. Time passes differently in the aftermath of genocide. As we see in post-war Srebrenica, the interval of time begins to enable new instances and new forms of engagement among various actors.

On a more abstract level, to intervene is also to influence: effecting change through ideas or material resources. This sense of the word is perhaps closest to the standard use of the term in post-conflict studies. But here we would add a nuance: to intervene in postwar Srebrenica has also involved official attempts to produce knowledge and, through those attempts, to secure authority over the past. By harnessing this knowledge, people claim legitimacy for decisions made in the present. Also implicit in these mechanisms of redress is the assumption that more verifiable data will lead to broader consensus, and that consensus, in turn, will be the basis for a stable, reformed state.<sup>11</sup> Examples from postwar Srebrenica, however, complicate this notion; they illustrate how more information about the past sometimes prompts competing counter-narratives, at least in the short term.

Intervening can also mean hindering or blocking: an argument, perhaps, or an action. We explain at the end of the book how strategies of obfuscation and denial on the part of nationalist Bosnian Serb and Serbian political leaders worked against the stated goals of liberal interventionists. They undermined the aims sponsored by the international community by using some of the very same venues of post-conflict repair, primarily the media and courts. Intervention can therefore mean steps taken to effect positive change, but at the same time it can refer to obstructionist discourse aimed at blocking reform. Taken together, as we argue throughout this study, these multivalent notions of intervention highlight the socio-political processes at hand, the people involved, and the unintended consequences that emerge.

### **A Culmination of the Strategy of Bosnian Serb Control**

The fall of the Srebrenica “safe area” on July 11, 1995, evokes, for many, images of unfettered aggression and abdicated responsibility: emaciated men suffering from heat exhaustion await their imminent execution in the hot summer sun; Dutch soldiers glance uncomfortably at cameras as they watch the troops of the Army of Republika Srpska (Vojska Republike Srpske or VRS) patrol the crowds of frightened displaced persons. Periodically flashing across televisions screens, such scenes are prominent in the cultural memory of postwar Bosnia. They have become emblematic of the war, so much so that they overshadow other events and atrocities, becoming abstracted from the war as a whole.

Scholars and politicians looking at the Srebrenica genocide tend to focus on the magnitude and intensity of the violence there; in so doing, they decontextualize the Srebrenica genocide from the rest of the war, and from the decisions about political and military intervention made by the international community beginning in the early spring of 1992. But the Srebrenica genocide was neither isolated nor aberrant. The fall of the enclave and the crimes that occurred there represent, on a local scale, the tragically logical extension of Bosnian Serb and Serbian nationalist



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Map 1.1. Map of Bosnia and Herzegovina. *Source:* United Nations.

campaigns to overtake territory and resources in Eastern Bosnia and, in the process, to expel their non-Serb populations. (See Map 1.1.) The violence that swept through the cities of Višegrad, Zvornik, Bratunac, Bijeljina, and Goražde and the villages throughout the Podrinje region in

March and April 1992 marked the beginning of the destruction that VRS General Ratko Mladić and his forces would bring to a terrifying peak at the UN “safe area” of Srebrenica in July 1995.<sup>12</sup>

As a military action and culmination of the VRS strategy of organized expulsion and destruction, the seizure of Srebrenica was a success: it fell swiftly and with little resistance. VRS videographers documented tanks firing from the hills above as troops picked off UN outposts before overtaking the city; they showed General Mladić praising his soldiers and brazenly making a “gift” of Srebrenica to the Serb people.

The actions in Srebrenica had their origins in “Directive 7” issued by the Republika Srpska leadership in March 1995. President Radovan Karadžić drafted the operational directive with the aim of destroying the enclaves of Srebrenica and Žepa, pockets of Bosnian Army-controlled territory within the Drina Valley. (See Map 1.2.) The Directive ordered the VRS to: “complete the physical separation of Srebrenica from Žepa as soon as possible, preventing even communication between individuals in the two enclaves. By planned and well-thought out combat operations, create an unbearable situation of total insecurity with no hope of further survival or life for the inhabitants of Srebrenica.”<sup>13</sup> Carrying out the political and military strategy of the preceding three and a half years, the genocide at Srebrenica overshadowed all other crimes in scale and intensity.

To extend Serb control over Eastern Bosnia, Directive 7 authorized the forcible removal of the Bosniak displaced, some 50,000 people who had sought refuge in Srebrenica and its surrounding villages and hamlets after the war broke out in the spring of 1992. The directive called for a violent intervention into the UN safe area. The destruction and expulsion of the local population accelerated as the VRS punctured the outer perimeters of the enclave. Fifteen thousand men and boys began to flee through the mountains, seeking cover in the forest as they attempted to break through to Bosnian government-controlled territory over 100 kilometers away. Some 25,000 people had sought shelter from the approaching violence at the UN base at Potočari, but there the VRS troops wrested over 1,000 old men and young boys from their families