



RESOURCE 8

Nirha Efendić – Survivor of the Srebrenica massacre, Bosnia



‘By the time of the genocide, I was 15. As the Serbian military descended upon Srebrenica, we ran for cover to Potočari. The UN base was completely full. So we hid in a nearby factory. My father and brother fled to join the column, but they couldn’t catch up to the men who had already left. I was told that they were captured by the Serbian military in the hills surrounding Srebrenica.

Meanwhile, my mother and I were in the empty factory with thousands of other women and children for three days. We had no food, and no water. By the fourth day, the Serbian military escorted us onto buses and trucks headed towards the free territory. The journey, which takes a maximum of one hour, took four gruelling hours to complete because of the sheer magnitude of women and children that needed to be transported.

Suffering from exhaustion and a high fever, I was completely unaware of what was happening around me. When we arrived in the free territory, I distinctly recall hearing screams coming from the river. But I never turned back to see what was happening. I just wanted to keep walking forward; away from the chaos, and away from the stench of death that hung heavily in the air. I can still hear those screams today.

A month later, we heard about my father. He had been kept in a hangar in Kravica with several other men, and later executed. His remains were finally identified in 2002 in a mass grave in Srebrenica, and we buried him in 2004. Four years ago, we heard about my brother. They found just 25 % of his mortal remains in secondary mass graves. He was killed in Zvornik, just 19 days before his 20th birthday.

I had definitely grown up by the time the conflict was over. My family was literally cut in half; my father and brother snatched from us in the most horrific way. And yet I understood that life had to go on. My mother enrolled me at a school in Zagreb, Croatia, and she went to Germany as a refugee.

After I finished secondary school, I returned to Bosnia with my mother. We rented a flat in Sarajevo until I graduated, and then my mother moved back to Srebrenica. I always knew that she would go back. She believes in justice, and she wanted to fight for what was and is rightfully hers – her home. So I was adamant to support her. But I chose to make a life for myself in Sarajevo. I married, had



children, and attempted to continue with my life. But the war, and in particular, the genocide, continue to haunt me. That sort of experience scars you in a way that cannot be communicated in words. I go back to Srebrenica at every opportunity I get. Not only for my mother, but also for myself – as a method of finding some stillness now in memories that are seared with the chaos of bloodshed and horror.

I pray that my three children grow up to be kind, tolerant people. I want to teach them to always be aware of everything around them, and to be smart about the decisions they make. I want to teach them about my past, so that they can be aware of their history. But for now, I just want them to enjoy a happy, carefree childhood, where they can feel safe and protected in their own home.'

Source: [Remembering Srebrenica](#)

Rewriting My History as a Rwandan Genocide Survivor, Nina Iliza

'It's almost April again.

My Facebook feed will soon be flooded with people who change their profile pictures to the Rwandan memorial, a single candlelight, and update their statuses with the words "never forget". For many people April is the month to commemorate the Rwandan genocide; it is the month to pay homage to those who lost their lives. However, to me, April is just another month I try to live without remembering the genocide. Throughout this month I am constantly reminded to never forget the very thing I wish I did not remember.

In 1994 my mother was killed. I stood there as she begged the soldiers to spare her life with both arms reaching out to me, signifying that I belonged to her, and that for me they should have mercy on her. Twenty years have passed and that is the most vivid image and memory I have of my mother. Twenty years later and I still find it hard to accept. Whenever I do force myself to sit and think about it, I become that little girl being pushed away from her pleading mother. There was so much lost in the month of April – my brother was killed the same day as my mother, my grandparents and other family members were also victims. So when I hear the words "never forget" my thoughts are: "How can I?"

I have always felt like the month of April is the month where people remember to sympathise with what I go through all year. Next month you will start to hear more talk about movies like Hotel Rwanda and Sometimes in April. Rwanda will be googled more often, and for 30 days there will be more talk than usual about the Land of a Thousand Hills. I envy those people who can partake in only 30 days of remembering the genocide – those who must be reminded to "never forget". I am jealous of people who need to read books and study what happened. I envy those who, for 11 months of the year, are not constantly reminded of the genocide. 20 years later and I still find it hard to attend a memorial and I find it preposterous to post or even say the phrase "never forget" only because remembering is so agonising.

But I have come to learn that acknowledging the truth is the first step to accepting it. Hiding my suffering for the past 20 years has gotten me nowhere. I cannot let the pain of my history be the





HOUSE OF EUROPEAN HISTORY

pain of my future. I found it imperative to create a way to rewrite my history so that my present self can begin to heal. I decided to rewrite the loss of my mother as the discovery of hope for myself and my country. (...)'

Source: [Nina Iliza, Huffington Post, 23.03.2014](#)

