



Telling Histories images, memories, narrations

Narratives of Survivors of Srebrenica: How Do They Reconnect to the World?



“When I wrote my book on the women survivors of Srebrenica I wanted their voices to be heard and I wanted to send a message to the world. The army sent by the Netherlands had stood by while all these men were slaughtered. Whether the outcome could have been different we shall never know.

Since my book *Surviving the Bosnian Genocide* was published (2011) I have gone back to Bosnia several times and I realize that hearing the women’s voices is not enough. The collective trauma demands forms of healing that have to be invented.

The displaced people obviously want economic conditions to improve, but more importantly they want to know why their husbands, fathers and sons were killed. They also want to know what happened elsewhere during the war. They wonder what took place on the international stage.

War never ends with a peace agreement such as the Dayton Accords pretend to be. “War” and “peace” are not mutually exclusive phenomena in history, but are intimately related. As Michel Foucault argued in *Society Must Be Defended*, peace is the continuation of war by other means. While many are still displaced in refugee camps, and others return to a place that is drenched in blood, the war goes on in the minds, imaginations, and nightmares of the survivors.

I shall talk about domestic violence, the outcome of collective rape, and possible models to understand a society of disaster.”

Selma Leydesdorff is professor of oral history and culture. Her career is part of the transformation of oral history from mostly a fact-finding method -adding to and criticizing traditional historical narratives- to research on the ways memory is framed and modified over time. It has always been influenced by women's history. She moved from gender studies to her present position. She promoted oral history by extensive teaching and with the help of the National research School of Cultural History she formalized the national network in oral history. At the moment she promotes interconnectivity between the many existing audio-visual websites while supporting major grant applications.

In 2002, she started a project with survivors of Srebrenica, which brought a major international attention as an oral historian of trauma. The book detailing the Srebrenica story was published first in Dutch, then in Bosnian, and an English translation. The American edition got major public attention and the book appeared in paperback in 2015. She lectured widely in the US and participated in several publication projects. Her article on Bosnia in the volume *Oral History on the Edge* (Oxford University Press 2014, ed S. Sloane, M. Cave) is part of a collection that got the price of the American Oral History Society 2015

Since 2008, she has recorded life stories around the trial of John Demjanjuk in Munich, including survivors of Sobibor and co-plaintiffs in the trial. The results have been published as www.lategevolgenvansobibor.nl.