

On the Record: Refugee Returns to Srebrenica

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dispatches from Bosnia were first published in AP's online newsletter On The Record. The photo shows a Serb boy during the 2000 municipal elections, which was physically barred to Muslims. Contact Peter at pl52ip@hotmail.com.



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From the AP Editorial Desk:

Peter Lippman's articles from Bosnia over the last year have demonstrated repeatedly that before a refugee can return home, he or she must have a home to return to. Usually, that home will be occupied by another refugee. Before it can be vacated, a house will have to be found for the squatter, or the squatter will himself have to return home.

It is this interconnection that makes repatriation so dauntingly complex. Nowhere is this more true than in Srebrenica.

The 1995 massacre turned Srebrenica into a symbol and underscored the agony of the Muslim population. Before the war, Muslims had accounted for over 70 percent of the municipality's population of 37,000.

But there are other victims in this story. These are the Serbs who moved into the houses that were left vacant by those killed or expelled. It is hard to feel much sympathy for these Serbs, but they too are casualties of the humanitarian catastrophe that has overtaken Bosnia during the last decade. Their predicament must be resolved before the Muslims can return.

There are 15,000 Serbs currently living in Srebrenica. Ten percent are original inhabitants; the rest have arrived since the massacre. Of these, several thousand were displaced in 1992 and 1993 by the forces of Naser Orić, the Muslim Army commander who was then operating from the town.

Their story is told in this issue through a profile of MILORAD MARJANOVIC, from the Association of Displaced Persons of Srebrenica. The association represents displaced Serbs who lived in the municipality before the war. In principle, many would like to return to their homes, but their villages are destroyed.

The second largest group of Serbs in Srebrenica came from Sarajevo in 1996. They were caught up in one of the most controversial incidents that occurred in the wake of the Dayton Agreement. In early 1996, about 60,000 Serbs left the suburbs of Sarajevo en masse in freezing cold, while international police and troops watched helplessly.

Some said they were fleeing persecution by the largely Muslim government of Sarajevo. Others claimed they were being forced to leave by their own Serb leaders, who sought to embarrass Sarajevo's Muslim government and repopulate eastern Bosnia with Serbs.

Over 2,000 of the Sarajevo Serbs went to Srebrenica. One of them, Rada, is profiled in the second article of this issue. She is a far cry from the swaggering Serb bullies who normally spring to mind when one thinks of Srebrenica. Rada yearns for her home in the suburbs of Sarajevo, just as the Muslims in Sarajevo and Tuzla yearn to return to Srebrenica.

Whether Rada can indeed go home hinges on a number of different factors. These are examined in the third article by Advocacy Project associate Paula Pickering.

Do the Serbs even want to return to Sarajevo? The picture is by no means uniform. As Peter notes, Sarajevo is a cosmopolitan city, and even if Srebrenica were not the gloomy place it is today, Sarajevans would still have trouble adjusting. But at the same time, many Serbs are still uncertain about returning to Sarajevo, just as they are to the rest of the Federation. They are fearful of reprisals and poverty.

The role of political leaders on both sides comes up repeatedly in Peter's dispatches. Neither of the two main nationalist parties - the (Muslim) SDA and the (Serb) SDS -- seems to want to see their people return home to the other side. That would dilute their own power base. As the fourth article in this issue makes clear, local Serb politicians in Srebrenica have done nothing to keep their people informed of the possibilities -- and everything to stoke their fears.

In the end, however, return is about people, not politics. One of the exiles from Srebrenica who Peter met and interviewed in Tuzla, Ibrahim Hadžić, is an employee of Srebrenica's municipal government. Hadžić's house is now occupied by a Serb that he used to work with: 'We know each other well. He is not a displaced person. He had an apartment that was not as nice as mine, so he took mine. We talk, but not about that. My things are there in the apartment. I have heard that I will receive permission to return.'

In other words, the mind-boggling complexities of refugee return can often be reduced to simple human emotions -- fear, greed, and nostalgia.

“What We are Most Afraid of Now is Eviction”

A profile of MILORAD MARJANOVIC, Association of Displaced Persons of Srebrenica

There are Serbs in Srebrenica from over 50 different municipalities all around Bosnia. But the majority were displaced from villages within the municipality in the early stages of the war.

During that period, the Muslim commander Naser Orić was expanding the area around Srebrenica under Muslim control. His forces destroyed Serb villages and scattered their population. Some of these people gravitated to Srebrenica after its fall. Other Serbs whose homes were not destroyed nevertheless took the opportunity at that time to become town-dwellers.

Some of these displaced villagers would like to return, and some would not. They are drawn by the prospect of earning a living from their farms, which would be far preferable to sitting idly without employment in Srebrenica. But farming requires the reconstruction of farms and infrastructure that no longer exists.

'It is a problem. What to do with a village where there were 50 houses, and now maybe there are three or four left?' asked Vina Lubura, staff member of the Office of the High Representative (OHR) in Srebrenica. 'How do you persuade people to move to a place 20 kilometers from here, where there is no school or doctor? If we had enough donors, we could repair houses for local people to return home.'

Dragan Jevtić, the deputy mayor in Srebrenica, commented, 'Serb villages around Srebrenica

were destroyed to the foundations. They are very hard to rebuild. And there is not a sincere intent to return to them. Those who are here do not want to return to the villages. In the village of Podravanje, Catholic Relief Services repaired 12 houses. But there will be no chance to have electricity there for ten years; that will require a donation of 1.5 million DM. There is no school, store, or bus there either, which they had before.'

Mr. Jevtić's remarks are clearly self-serving and must be taken with a grain of salt. But there is very little reconstruction under way in the area around the town. The Srebrenica branch of the Danish Refugee Committee (DRC) reported 600 requests for assistance by Serbs in the first half of the year. (Soločuša and Bibići were two of the localities that were mentioned.) The DRC also cited lack of donations this year as a significant obstacle to reconstruction.

It could be hard to sustain village life without younger villagers -- yet these are precisely the ones who tend to leave for good because they can find work elsewhere. Some have moved to Serbia, and some abroad. Even if there are those who are willing to return, there may not be enough to make the village viable.

Milorad Marjanović represents a group of Serbs displaced from villages around Srebrenica. Marjanović is disabled and wishes to remain in Srebrenica. During a recent interview he dwelt on the prospect of the return of Srebrenica's Muslims. He said that he expected them to return but that alternative housing would have to be found for people like himself as they evacuate Muslim-owned homes.

The Association of Displaced Persons of Srebrenica represents displaced Serbs who lived in Srebrenica municipality before the war, in villages around the town, or in houses in Srebrenica that are now destroyed. Today, they live in apartments and houses belonging to Muslims. They are in the most unenviable situation of all the displaced Serbs.

Mr. Marjanović said, 'This organization was formed on February 9, 1998. We are not affiliated with any party. We have a space in the community center, but no money for furniture. We have no computer; we don't even have chairs. As for our activities, we organize public forums, where people bring their questions and learn about their rights and the laws regarding property and return. We need to start to think for ourselves. We have raised the consciousness of our people.

'There are around 2,500 of us. During the war, our property was completely destroyed. Now we have nothing. We are trying to get our government and the international community to find donors to fix our homes, so that we can free up those belonging to the Muslims.

'We don't have any representatives in political parties. Politics is politics. Politicians enrich themselves; they come and go. Politics in this country needs time to mature as a process. As for the local government, even if they wanted to help us, they couldn't. They have no resources. No factories are running. The economy needs to be developed.

'The atmosphere for return to Srebrenica is good, but not for throwing anyone else out onto the street. The right to one's property is not in question. If people had work and another place to live, there would be no problem.

'What we are most afraid of now is eviction. I live in a Muslim-owned house. When I came here, I found this house empty. It was nothing special. I fixed it up. Some people don't let the owners in, but I did. The woman who owns it came to visit and was very pleased at the shape that it is in. Now, it wouldn't be nice if she were to return, and I ended up on the street. She wants to return. I am not against that or anyone else's return. But there is simply not a place for everyone to return to now.

'I am from a village about 15 kilometers from here. In June of 1992 it was entirely destroyed. After that, I lived in Bratunac until the end of the war, at which time I moved to Srebrenica. Yesterday it was seven and a half years since I have been out of my village. Every night when I lie down, I worry about being evicted. Personally, I am very worried about it.

'My goal is to have return take place in a correct way, with repair of houses happening first. Because if ten families return to Srebrenica, and ten of us are out onto the street, that is not a solution. I am not disputing anyone's right to return; this is not my property. But it would be better to solve the problem for 20 families in a year, and solve it well, than to cram the town full of refugees when the conditions do not exist. There is no work here. If you bring 2,000 more people here without work, that is no solution -- it will only bring an increase in social problems.

'Displaced Srebrenicans come here to visit, from Tuzla, Sarajevo, and other places. They are like us -- they tell us it wouldn't occur to them to kick us out onto the street.

'A high number of people from the villages were killed during the war. I was disabled and now use an artificial leg. My father has had a serious operation and is not able to work. For return, we would need the conditions to do farm work, the machines. There's not a single dinar to repair our house, to buy a kilo of flour.

'If a relief organization were to fix the village I came from, then there would be conditions to return. Before the war, there were around 50 houses there. However, around 27 people in my village were killed, and those were young people. Other people moved to Serbia and built houses there. They no longer expect to return. This leaves a smaller number of people to return to the village, with a majority of older people. Say I return, at age 47, with nothing. But I can't work, because of my leg. So for my family, the conditions for return will not really exist. Say ten or so families return to the village. If there are a few children of school age, that will be a problem.

'I am working in a forestry company where I worked before the war. I have two children. Before the war, I bought some land in Serbia. I had planned to build and work there; I have two sisters there. But because of my artificial leg, I can't do anything. The best thing for me would be just to get some kind of apartment here.

'A high number of villages are going to be left empty. For that matter, Serbs were starting to emigrate in the 1960s and 1970s. There are a lot of Serbs in centers for displaced persons in the Republika Srpska who don't want to return to the Federation. Some of them have sold their property. Now they live in houses or flats belonging to other people, and they are faced with eviction. There are displaced persons in Srebrenica from 56 municipalities around Bosnia. They can return home, or else they can sell or trade their property. But for us, there is no such solution.

'There is much talk about the solution, but not much work being done on it. The demagogues are working overtime. They should come to fix one house and not talk for a couple of weeks. But they have hardly given one brick for repair.'

Mr. Marjanović's comments graphically illustrate the confounding set of problems that confront the internally displaced Serbs of Srebrenica. There are some common points between his assessment and that of return activists on the other (Federation) side, such as Ibrahim Hodžić. Both agree that economic recovery is a prerequisite to return and the restoration of Srebrenica. Both say that return must take place in an orderly manner.

Where they differ is in numbers: if only 20 Muslim families return each year, as Mr. Marjanović suggests, Srebrenica will never retrieve anything like its pre-war vitality.

But I took heart from something that Mr. Marjanović did not say. He noted that 'a high number of people from the villages were killed during the war.' But he did not continue as I expected: '...so we can never live with those Muslims again.' He is a realist, and that is a good sign.

Rada's Story

After the Dayton Agreement was signed in late 1995, Sarajevo was reunified. The outlying neighborhoods that had been controlled by the Serbs throughout the war became part of the Federation. At this point, as many as 60,000 Serbs who had been living in neighborhoods like Ilijaš and Vogošća left in mass for the Republika Srpska. Some went voluntarily, but many were intimidated into leaving.

This was consistent with the goals of hard-line Serb nationalists, because it meant that these Serbs could be moved to municipalities that had been in a Muslim majority, thus cementing the new demographic map. Over 2,000 ended up in the Srebrenica area.

One of them, Rada (not her real name), now lives with her family near Srebrenica. The story she tells here is similar to that of thousands of displaced Serbs living in the area, except that her father is originally from Croatia. Because of that, she lives with the double stigma of being a displaced person and coming from an ethnically mixed family.

Rada: 'I was the child of a mixed marriage. I finished a degree in economics just before the war in Croatia broke out (1991). The war in Croatia had a strong influence on us. We had a thousand worries, since my father was from there.'

'The war that was to come in Bosnia was not really something that you could see, that you really understood. You watched television, but what you saw was like a film. It wasn't really real; we weren't aware how close it was. Then it started in Sarajevo. I wasn't in the war, but I saw Sarajevo, and the bombs were falling. I don't really believe that someone who has not been in a war really understands what war is. We were all collectively blind.'

'Then someone said that the war was coming to our area within a couple of days. When it began,

the police and the army split up, right at the beginning. The Bosniaks (Muslims) left the neighborhood. Then we started to have more problems because of my father.

'Because of politics, one gets the impression that Serbs are really bad people. Not all Serbs are bad, but I had problems with some Serbs. In my neighborhood, there were local gangs that were in charge. That happened everywhere. Some of those guys came and threw hand grenades at my house, and they were demanding money. We were also called up for 'informational conversations.' There were no police. These were just people who were 'someone.' It was a racket to earn protection money. There were no controls at the beginning of the war. Whoever wanted to, had a gun and therefore had authority. Like many other people, we had to pay money to keep out of trouble. This was very common.

'Then they said to my father that he had to be mobilized, in order to prove that he was not against the Serb forces. He had to go.

'When they mobilized my father, he and my mother sent me away. I started to leave the country, but I turned back. I realized that I did not have anyone except my family. I said to them, 'Whatever happens to you, happens to me too.' We have very strong family connections.

'We had some friends and moral support within the community. Still, I was afraid that my father would be killed. Then the authorities said that I had to go into the army. I was not required to carry a gun, but to go work at the radio. This was to show my loyalty.

'I had to go. But on the first day, on my way to work, I was wounded by shrapnel. I was wounded in my hip and in my back. This was luck, because I could have been killed. So I was 'wounded as a Serb soldier!' I was taken to the hospital. It was when I was in recovery that I decided to learn English. I had a friend who worked with the United Nations. He had suggested that I learn English. I didn't go back into the army, thank God.

'Around this time a soldier came to me and suggested that we start a relationship. It was for mutual benefit: he would protect me and would live with my family. Also, my father had a second heart attack, so the army decided to let him go home.

'I was spending time with some foreigners, practicing English, through my friend who was in the United Nations. Then I was called for another 'informational conversation,' and I was accused of being a spy.

'In May of 1994 I married that soldier. I can't say that I ever loved him. We had two children. In that year I started working for the municipality, and then in 1995 I began work for another international agency. That work lasted until 1997.

'There were no casualties in my immediate family, fortunately. But six members of my birth father's family had their throats cut, because of their surname. One of my first cousins was killed. He was a blind man. Bad things happened on all sides.

'Then there was the NATO bombing. The war ended in late 1995. After Dayton was signed, my

family left our neighborhood. We had no choice. The authorities told us to stay, but we could see the trucks loading up and leaving. They were removing whole factories. I asked, why are they leaving? And what happens then? People were removing their dead from the cemeteries.

'Officially we were told to stay, but unofficially, we knew that we were expected to leave. And there were bandits who were coming into the neighborhood, both Serbs and Croats, who were stealing things and beating people up. I don't know what happened later, when the Muslims came.

'Now we think this was our mistake. We should have stayed. We should have blocked the road.

'On the first of January [1996], the agency I was working with moved out of my neighborhood to Pale. At this time there was a huge exodus of Serbs from all of the outer neighborhoods of Sarajevo, which were being reunited with the core of the city.

'I watched the exodus from my office window in Pale. There was an endless line of cars. The weather was bad; it was very cold with deep snow. There were cars, trucks, tractors, horse and wagons, and people on foot. Some were carrying dead bodies. I was sick and couldn't do anything to help. Some people had tried to go through Sarajevo, but they were stoned.

'I watched these people and knew that my family could be among them. In each vehicle there were at least four people. That's four lives, four life stories. Tens of thousands of people left. There were many car accidents.

'One evening my parents arrived with my aunt, who was paralyzed. No one wanted to take care of her. They went to [a nearby town]. Thousands of people arrived there, and there was not much room. Four years later, there are still some people living in collective centers. My parents slept in a truck and then in a garage. For that they paid 150 DM a month (\$80). My parents, two aunts and uncles, four children, and another whole family stayed there. It was better than nothing. I was in Pale, working. I was lucky, because I could pay for their lodgings.

'After three months, we got one floor of a family house. But it's still crowded, after the big house we had in my old neighborhood.

'I was hoping to move back to my old neighborhood in Sarajevo. But when I went back there last year, I found out that our family house had been destroyed. I don't know who did it. But they knew me; there was graffiti with my name in it, on the wall. I was shocked at the situation there; I didn't imagine it would be so bad. I had been dreaming about going back this spring.

'This has been going on for ten years. Now I have no more strength. Do I have hopes? I don't know. I hope somehow to be able to live normally again, to be in an honest place. I would like to go away from the Balkans, away from Europe as far as possible, where no one will ever ask me again what my last name is.'

From Srebrenica to Sarajevo

*by Paula Pickering**

During the exodus of Serbs from the Sarajevo suburbs in early 1996, Serb politicians directed approximately 2,500 Sarajevo Serbs to Srebrenica in the hopes that populating the enclave with Serbs would consolidate control over territory they had captured in eastern Bosnia.

How were they able to convince people who once lived in the cosmopolitan Sarajevo area to leave it for a rural, isolated, desolate outpost such as Srebrenica? And what are their intentions toward Sarajevo now?

The staff of the Srebrenica OHR helped me to contact Bosnian Serbs from Sarajevo who now live in Srebrenica. I traveled there to interview Milan (not his real name), a representative of a group of displaced Serbs. As we sipped 'Greek coffee' (as it is called by the displaced in Srebrenica) I asked for his views on return.

Milan took a deep breath and began to explain why -- in his view -- so few displaced Serbs have returned to now Muslim-majority areas of Bosnia, like Sarajevo.

'Return doesn't just mean the return of one's house, but the return of one's town. This means the return of schools, movies, hospitals, and workplaces. Because it is not the streets that make a town, but the people. And Sarajevo now isn't my Sarajevo.'

To Milan, then, return refers not just to a place, but also to a time -- a time before the war when the community of which he was a part still existed. Milan continued to express his distress over the disintegration of the pre-war community of Sarajevo: 'Its population has completely changed.'

Milan and many of the people whom he represents would only return to Sarajevo under certain conditions. These include the restoration of Sarajevo's pre-war population and equal opportunities for work.

For Milan, the demographic changes that have occurred in Sarajevo have all but severed his association with his former community. In other words, moving back to Sarajevo now would mean moving to an urban area dominated by new persons of the 'other' ethno-religious background and their priorities.

Milan said, 'I'll return to Sarajevo when Sarajevo's prewar population is restored. Tens of thousands were expelled from the Sarajevo area. Now, it's Islamicized -- there are new mosques, a new population, new building.'

I asked if some Serb authorities had tried to entice Serbs into leaving Sarajevo and resettling in eastern Bosnia by promising them rewards, such as land and housing. His indirect answer was a comment on the relationship between politics and society: 'I don't trust politicians. How can politicians promise to give something that isn't theirs to give? Before the war, I never thought about politics. I never knew who was mayor of my municipality. That's how it

is in economically good times. It's not important that ordinary people impact politics. But it is important that politics does not impact ordinary people and their lives.'

Milan asserted that urban Bosnians feel that they have little in common with the less educated, ill-mannered, and 'backward' peasants -- regardless of ethnicity -- who have now flooded into their cities. Thus, even long-term Muslim residents of Sarajevo show distance and often contempt for their ethno-religious kin from Bosnian villages and from the Sandžak (a Muslim-populated area straddling Serbia and Montenegro) who have become their new neighbors. Some of my Bosnian Muslim friends and colleagues from Sarajevo tell me that their affiliation with an urban community meant they would prefer their pre-war neighbors over their new ones.

Milan expanded on this theme of urban-rural divisions in his discussion of the neighborhood. He says that he enjoyed 'correct' relations with his old pre-war neighbors when he visited his Sarajevo home several times after the war. But he said there is a sharp gulf between the Serbs and Croats who fled Sarajevo, and the displaced Muslims from other regions who came to Sarajevo and have been temporarily placed in minorities' homes.

'I don't talk to the new neighbors [in Sarajevo],' Milan said. 'They are in Serb houses. Displaced persons from Srebrenica do not want to return to Srebrenica. Now, they are near the city and the tram and cafes. One of the local officials for Srebrenica, whom the ruling party provided with a good job in Sarajevo, called once on his cell phone from Café Park. This is a café in which my school friends and I used to spend the best of times. People like these send only their grandmothers to Srebrenica and then the rest of the 10-member family stay in Serb homes in the city.'

Milan said he needed a job before he could return, and implied that he would face discrimination because of his ethnicity. 'I'm afraid of losing even my very small wage here to return to Sarajevo and risk having no job and no salary. I returned recently to my prewar workplace in Sarajevo to obtain my employment record. Only five percent of my pre-war colleagues still work there.'

Milan commented on the exodus of highly educated professionals -- regardless of ethnicity -- from Sarajevo: 'Serb colleagues went to the Republika Srpska, and Muslim colleagues left for third countries.' He saw a glimmer of hope in the fact that the current director of the firm is an old school chum. 'When she saw me, she said that she waits for me to return to work there. I think, but I'm not completely sure, that she was sincere.'

Education also concerns Milan. He believes that each ethno-religious group should be taught according to its own curriculum and texts, rather than all Bosnian children learning through a common curriculum and texts. 'My language is Serbian. My child does not want to go to a school where he will read that Serbs are 'Chetniks' [extreme-nationalist Serbs].'

'My children's future won't be as bright as mine was. Every generation must endure two wars,' Milan said. Describing generational differences, he explained that his own generation had been brought up in a culture of 'brotherhood and unity' whereas his children's generation

had been socialized by propaganda and the experience of a ghastly, brutal war. 'The newest generation has hate that my generation didn't have. They use terms like 'baliija' [a backward, crude Muslim peasant] and 'Chetnik.'

According to Milan, 'Bosnia needs one or the other -- genuine partition or genuine return.' Like most displaced persons, Milan finds himself somewhere in the middle and resents it deeply.

** Paula Pickering is an associate of The Advocacy Project who contributed to this series*

The Information Gap

Many Bosnian Muslims feel that the displaced Serbs living in Srebrenica are particularly vulnerable to manipulation by their nationalist politicians, who play on their fears and exercise tight control over the information available to them. This discourages those Serbs who would be friendly to returning Muslims, from speaking out.

Zehra Ferhatbegović, a displaced person and return activist from the Srebrenica area explained, 'These people want us to return, but they cannot speak about this publicly in the Republika Srpska [RP]. They talk to each other about it in the coffee houses. The RS government wants to keep the displaced Serbs, for example those from Sarajevo, where they are now. They give these people advantages, houses, apartments. Now our ex-neighbors, Serbs who were always in that area, are unhappy because of this. The displaced Serbs there are getting priority treatment from the RS government. But if our friends who are in favor of our return talk about it publicly, there can be problems for them.'

Serb leaders deny the charge. Instead, they try to project an image of pragmatism and reasonableness.

Srebrenica's Deputy Mayor Dragan Jevtić told me: 'A great number of people here don't want to return to Sarajevo. Some of them don't want to stay here either. They don't know where they want to go, but they are avoiding return to their old homes. But no one who has a house in Vogošća would think of trading it for one.'

'I was born and raised in Ilijaš. I came here after Dayton. I couldn't find another place. But here, I didn't have a problem. I saw that other neighbors of mine, who went to Zvornik and Bijeljina, have problems. I opened a pizzeria here, live better here, and don't want to return. I have young children. It would be a problem to return. I don't wish to return. But I have a house there, and I would like to trade or sell it.'

'My mother would like to return home to Sarajevo. She submitted a request to return to her home. The day will probably come when the people who live in that house will be evicted.'

One thing is clear: leaders like Jevtić have done little to keep their constituents informed of the possibilities. Indeed, the lack of information is one of the foremost obstacles to the return of displaced Serbs. Media coverage of return issues, and particularly information about

property laws, has been more restricted in the Republika Srpska than in the Federation. This is especially true in more remote localities such as Srebrenica, which have been under the control of more hard-line local governments.

One displaced Srebrenican, Ilijaš Begić, described this lack of information in a report from the Sarajevo daily *Oslobodjenje*: 'Ten days ago I spoke with some Serbs in Srebrenica and their general attitude towards starting return was that they want their property back, but they don't want to return home. They are totally misinformed, which could be seen by the question of one person from Ilijaš [a Sarajevo neighborhood], who wanted to know whether or not the Glagolitic [ancient pre-Cyrillic] alphabet is used in our schools, or perhaps the Arabic alphabet. I answered him that that was ridiculous, and that in the Federation there are many Serbs who are educational and cultural workers, even very highly regarded ones.'

'Many Serbs, after our conversation, expressed a desire for return. The information blockade is created by the hard-liners and those renting out Muslim property who, wanting to keep the monopoly for themselves, transmit disinformation. Those are Serbs who came to Srebrenica and received positions that they didn't have earlier. And Srebrenicans (Serbs) who got good employment want to keep it. One of these, for instance, is Cvijetinović, director of the Srebrenica television station. Or the deputy president of the municipal council Dragan Jevtić, who before the war was a waiter in Ilijaš. Those are key people who are preventing return and spread around this kind of talk.' (*Oslobodjenje*, December 13, 1999)

If displaced Serbs are not aware of their right to reclaim the property that they left in the Federation, they will be that much more likely to remain stuck in someone else's home. Organizations such as the Coalition for Return and CARE International are working to provide more accurate information to the thousands of displaced Serbs in the eastern part of the Republika Srpska.

In December I attended a seminar presented by CARE in Bratunac, to the north of Srebrenica. The meeting was notable for its lack of organization, which may have been a difficult proposition in any case due to the anxiety, frustration, and confusion on the part of those attending. The meeting was organized by the Tuzla- and Bratunac-based nongovernmental organization (NGO) Bospo (Bosnia Help) at a local elementary school. Around 70 people, mostly men over the age of 50, crowded into a small classroom.

The CARE instructors informed listeners as to property claims submission deadlines, and the fact that Serbs are truly returning to Sarajevo. The message was, 'No one can stay in other people's property. It is now a different situation from one year ago. You have the right to sell, exchange your property, receive compensation for it, or return home. That property in Sarajevo is yours; no one can take it away. But return is a long and complex process. And other people's property will never be ours, unless we buy it.'

One man said, 'I live here now; I invested everything I had here. My house in Sarajevo was desecrated.' The answer to this was, 'If you register to return, your house will be fixed. But you must register.' Mistrust of these instructors who were visiting Bratunac for the first time was thick. Other people commented: 'Don't lie to us. I've been here for four years, and

nothing has happened.' I got my apartment back August 1999. It was devastated. There were no doors, no electricity.'

One instructor was at a loss to placate the attendees, one of whom asked, 'Have any Serbs returned yet? Why are they pushing us to leave here?' She answered, 'More Serbs have returned to Sarajevo, than Muslims have returned here.' At the time, no Muslims had returned to Srebrenica.