Toronto Bosnians to fill coffee cups to mark Srebrenica genocide

Deena Douara
The Globe and Mail
Published Friday, Jul. 11, 2014 6:26PM EDT
Last updated Tuesday, Aug. 19, 2014 10:57AM EDT

Bosnian coffee will be poured into thousands of small porcelain cups placed together on the ground at Dundas Square Saturday. They will remain full, however, because the people whom they are meant for won’t be there to drink them.

The Toronto Bosnian community will commemorate the Srebrenica genocide with a travelling monument – 3,500 cups donated by families worldwide – that pays homage to missing loved ones and haunting memories.

Toronto will be the ninth city to host the interactive Što Te Nema, meaning both “Why are you not here?” and “Where have you been?,” marking the 19th anniversary of Europe’s worst massacre since the Second World War.

 “[Coffee] characterizes Bosnian culture more than anything else,” says Aida Sehovic, the New York-based artist behind the event. “And it’s specifically the way we drink coffee. ... it’s almost always shared.”

Ms. Sehovic, a Bosnian refugee, remembers vividly her 2004 trip home. It was the year that bodies from mass graves were first identified and buried. She recalls an account from a man her age who as a teen survived execution because he tripped and was covered by dead bodies.

That same trip she met a woman who’d lost all her male family members. “But I realized her story is multiplied by thousands,” Ms. Sehovic says. Years later, she would honour their pain with her project.

Haris Celic, the 22-year-old organizer of Toronto’s event, saw the monument in Istanbul and was so impressed by the outcome that he felt compelled to bring it home.

“I think that people don’t know about [the war]. ... They don’t really know any details of what happened and how it happened.” The hardest part for him, he said, is the denial by some that a genocide took place.

The war’s impact is ever-present in Mr. Celic’s life. “You look at the community and there’s a huge age gap between generations ... there are not many people like me in their early 20s,” he says. “There’s a missing age group.”
He says survivors will be at Saturday’s event.

But not all local Bosnians will be attending. Many, like Leila Handanovic, have returned home to remember with family and community. There, she watches memorial services, wears a white Srebrenica flower and mourns all the victims of the nearly four-year war.

“We are remembering because it is impossible to forget. Especially today,” Ms. Handanovic said.

July 11, 1995, was the beginning of the most severe massacre of many. More than 7,000 Bosnian men and boys were killed by Serbian forces in the Srebrenica “safe zone” over a matter of days, according to the The International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia. It’s estimated that 100,000 people from both sides were killed in the war, and 2.2 million Bosnians were displaced, according to the tribunal.

Što Te Nema takes place at Dundas Square from 12 to 6 p.m. Mr. Celic expects there will be 4,000 cups by day’s end.

Follow me on Twitter: @Deena_Do [https://twitter.com/Deena_Do]

Follow us on Twitter: @GlobeToronto [https://twitter.com/@GlobeToronto]

More Related to this Story

- [Bosnian mom buries her two sons, among nearly 700 newly identified Srebrenica massacre victims](https://example.com)

Next Story

- [Alleged exchange with gender identity doctor didn’t happen, CAMH says](https://example.com)