

Guest Lecture: Ziyah Gafic Love thy Neighbor, Bosnian Diaries

November 8 & 9, 2007



Photographs by ZIYAH GAFIC/ GETTY IMAGES

Beacon High School
Washingtonville High School

Biography

Ziyah Gafic was born in 1980 in Sarajevo, Bosnia. Gafic began his professional photography career in 2001 after earning a degree in world literature from Sarajevo University. He focuses on societies in conflict and transition, and the aftermath of war. Since 1999, he has completed projects in his native Bosnia as well as Palestine, Israel, Kurdistan, Iraq, Ossetia, Rwanda, Chechnya and Afghanistan.

Gafic's work has appeared in *Liberation*, *Le Monde* 2, *La Repubblica*, *Photo*, *Telegraph Magazine*, *The New York Times Magazine*, *Tank*, *L'Espresso* and *Newsweek*. Gafic won the Ian Parry Scholarship in 2001 and attended World Press Photo's Joop Swart Masterclass. In 2002, he won Kodak's Award for Young Reporters and several World Press Photo honors. He has also been exhibited at *Visa Pour l'Image Festival of Photojournalism* in Perpignan, France. *Photo District News* named Gafic an Emerging Artist in 2003; that same year he won Grand Prix Discovery of the Year at *Rencontres du Photographie Arles*. Gafic's work in Chechnya received the Giacomelli Memorial Fund award. In 2007, he was nominated for UNICEF's Photographer of the Year, and in 2007 Gafic won the Getty Images Grant for Editorial Photography.

His work has been widely exhibited in Perpignan, Arles, Amsterdam, London, Milan, New York, Geneva. His photo essay on aftermath of Bosnian war was published in a book *Tales from a Globalizing World* by Thames & Hudson. His photographs are also included in Thames & Hudson book *Photography as Contemporary Art*. He just completed his long-term project "Troubled Islam: Short Stories from Troubled Societies." Ziyah Gafic continues to live in Sarajevo.

Aftermath Introduction: An Existential Choice

June 2004

by *Grazia Neri*

The circumstances in which a person becomes a professional photographer are infinite and often legendary and as Ziyah Gafic is only 23 years old and already represents a myth in the world of photo reportage, together with the fact that he gets awards and recognition everywhere, makes him worth some reflection. I first met Ziyah Gafic at World Press Photo, an institution that I love profoundly because it helped me understand my work better and, above all, created a possibility to meet photographers in person.

In the hall of Felix Merits (now famous) in between the two projections, Paul Lowe introduced me with Ziyah: a face young and intense, a face that doesn't know western dullness and bore-international political situation and about literature.

I am impressed by his knowledge of history, of events and, for me; this represents an exciting guiding principle when working with a photographer. Gafic is different by nature from the great western photographers who went to work in Bosnia with commitment and courage, sacrificing money, carrier, time, private life and who have left a documentation of great importance, a portrayal on 5 years of war seen through the eyes of a Westerner, but who have often admitted to be devastated and powerless in front of this experience (let's not forget that the War has caused 250.000 dead people and 1,500.000 refugees); he is different because he sees all this with an extra eye, if you can say it like this, because he felt this experience on his own skin as a boy and after a few years he told us all about it to make us act politically and be an active part in what we live.

"I heard the bullets whizzing and saw corpses being picked up, fortunately I was always only a few centimeters away, whenever I was going to school" tells Ziyah, and exactly during those years he meets the famous western photographers and sees how they work, but his choice to become a photographer is made as an existential choice. Ziyah has lived in a horror and he felt the consequences on his own skin, on his family, his friends, yet he chooses to act politically to change the situation, to bring back dignity and identity to Bosnia.



Brothers Hassan and Saad Nasir Alamy said they've been imprisoned by Saddam's regime without a trial. Some scars are from the torture, some of the self wounding. They claim that after the prison they're psychologically challenged.



Kid burns the remains of furniture in front of his house in Jenin. It was destroyed during the Israeli military's "Operation Defensive Shield." June 2002, Jenin

Photographs by ZIYAH GAFIC/ GETTY IMAGES

The war is finished but the consequences of war continue. He decides to get a degree in literature but in the same time starts to photograph for a weekly magazine. His understanding of the western world (he speaks English and Italian perfectly) make him learn quickly about the mechanisms which function in the international newspaper market. In his first documentary works which got many awards, he tells us about his family right after the War, about the discovery of common graves and the identification of corpses.

Many photographers have confronted this topic but, in my opinion, Gafic uses a surprisingly new language in pursuing a classical composition. His photographs seem to be here to stay in the huge world of photography production thanks to his courage to use color and medium format (very powerful in portraying interiors and details) and to his extraordinary effort to treat photography as a singular element which can be valid on its own but which finds its strength and stunning beauty in the series of pictures which create a story.

His pictures are put in sequence with the utmost attention. I'll make myself clear: in the two series "The Last Bosnian Village" and "Family Album", most of the photographs are so beautiful and soaked with meaning that they could exist autonomously as single poems, but when put in sequence they become a historical "portrait". The series "Quest for ID" is a masterpiece of its intensity and respect in recounting one of the most horrifying stories of this war: identification of corpses from the common graves. The photographs of the hanging laundry or the photo of the shoes represent condemnations much

stronger than the pictures of the corpses themselves. Those pictures bring us back to numerous victims, to many sufferings, to the things that are no more. And, I think, for Bosnians this represents regret for the massacred generations, families broken up forever.

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After doing pictures on his own country, Gafic continues to confirm his political and existential choice and decides to keep telling about consequences of other wars and in 2002 and the beginning of 2003 he finds himself in Palestine and Iraq. Even in these moments we can see how a photographer carries on his political and historical commitment to denounce by making new pictures, but with same ability even when found in another context. These are the works that are not yet completed but which reveal the growth of Ziyah who is very gifted in telling about daily life and in approaching people. The pretty Iraqi girl turning her eyes to the remains after the destruction invites us to keep on struggling because the things will also be changing for her.

I believe that very soon the western photography will be enriched, like is already happening in other creative fields, by the presence of photographers from former Yugoslavia and East European countries. Ziyah's compositions definitely remind us of painting, but what kind of painting? In some photographs (Last Bosnian Village) it's classical painting, but in some photographs of Palestine and of Iraq we recognize contemporary painting. New eyes, new ways of seeing are ready to tell us about the world, eyes which, like in this case, come from a life experience which expresses itself clearly and honestly free from the obstacles of ego and open to the history.



Photograph by ZIYAH GAFIC/ GETTY IMAGES

TROUBLED ISLAM

Short Storie from Troubled Societies by Ziyah Gafic

This is a series of photo essays, on the aftermath of war and violence in the daily life of people living in dominantly Muslim societies in Europe, Africa and Asia. I aim to capture the quiet, the loneliness and the determination of people trying to carry on with their lives after the very fabric of their community, their rituals and their social life has been torn apart.

When the Bosnian war started I was 12: too young to take part, to fight or to take photographs. I was, however, old enough to be targeted and to be part of the Balkan news circus - as an object. Unlike many other Bosnians, my family was fairly lucky. My disabled aunt was burned alive in her house and her remains were never recovered; my grandfather committed suicide after he recognized the same pattern of ethnic hate he had fought fiercely as Tito's partisan in World War 2; one of my cousins was gang raped.

Growing up in besieged Sarajevo and witnessing the war from the point of view of someone to whom the war was actually happening but not being able to take part in it left me deeply frustrated. Photography allowed me to be on the other side of the event. Frustration grew into the determination to document the long and painful aftermath in post-war Bosnia.

While completing this work I realized that there are a number of transitional countries in the world following similar patterns of guerre fraternelles, ethnic violence followed by ethnic cleansing and ultimately – genocide. All that fueled by ancient disputes about property or natural resources. I expanded the project on aftermath to other places locked in a struggle similar to that in my homeland: Palestine/Israel, Kurdistan, Iraq, Ossetia, Rwanda, Chechnya, Lebanon and Afghanistan. My aim is to compare and to try to understand the circumstances and the political environment that can lead a country to its disintegration and above all to record the consequences for the human condition in these places. For someone who went through war and personal loss empathy is essential, and empathy is the main aim of this project. To bring those people closer to us, instead of alienating them even more, to bring the viewer to sympathize with them and ultimately understand them.

The countries I decided to photograph have one more important thing in common: they all have a significant Muslim community. In post 9.11 times when these countries are considered the main sources of international terrorism, I as a European Muslim find it obligatory to record the chain of events unfolding in these places and show their fragility: torn apart by ethnic hate, long and exhausting conflicts, polluted with the legacy of colonial rule and Cold War, while very often being regarded as a cradle of our civilization, mysterious and beautiful.

I've been documenting aftermath since 2000. Nine chapters include photo essays on; Bosnia: a painful aftermath and identification of the missing persons, Palestine: one of the longest conflicts of 20th century and new separation wall, Iraq: the troubled neighborhood of Sadr City, Kurdistan: at dawn of the coalition invasion, Rwanda : the genocide generation - children born after the systematic rape in 1994 where among the main warmongers were two Muslim journalists, Northern Ossetia: aftermath of Beslan siege, Chechnya: daily life in Grozny, Afghanistan: damaged people, damaged landscape and Lebanon: aftermath of recent Israeli military campaign. These essays unpretentiously illuminate the pattern of questionable international involvement and focus on the people left behind, struggling to restore some kind of daily order in their damaged environments.

The Bosnian Civil War 1992-1995

Beginning several months after the fighting in the republics of Slovenia and Croatia, the Bosnian civil war was the most brutal chapter in the breakup of Yugoslavia. On February 29, 1992, the multi-ethnic republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina, where Catholic Croats, Orthodox Serbs, and Muslim Slavs lived side by side, passed a referendum for independence -- but not all Bosnian Serbs agreed. Under the guise of protecting the Serb minority in Bosnia, Serbian leaders like Slobodan Milosevic (1941-) channeled arms and military support to them.

In spring 1992, for example, the federal army, dominated by Serbs, shelled Croats and Muslims in Sarajevo, the Bosnian capital. Foreign governments responded with sanctions (not always tightly enforced) to keep fuel and weapons from Serbia, which had (in April 1992) joined the republic of Montenegro in a newer, smaller Yugoslavia. Bosnian Serb guerrillas carried out deadly campaigns of "ethnic cleansing," massacring members of other ethnic groups or expelling them from their homes to create exclusively Serb areas. Attacks on civilians and international relief workers disrupted supplies of food and other necessities just when such aid was most crucial: in what became the worst refugee crisis in Europe since World War II, millions of Bosnians (and Croatians) had been driven from their homes by July 1992.

Alarmed by ethnic cleansing and other human rights abuses (which Croats and Muslims also engaged in, though to a lesser extent than did the Serbs), the United Nations resolved to punish such war crimes. In early 1994 the fierce three-way fighting became a war between two sides. In February and March the Muslims and Croats in Bosnia called a truce and formed a confederation, which in August agreed to a plan (developed by the United States, Russia, Britain, France and Germany) for a 51-49 split of Bosnia, with the Serbs getting the lesser percentage. Despite the Muslim-Croat alliance, the peace proposal, and an ongoing arms embargo against all combatants (an embargo criticized abroad for maintaining Bosnian Serb dominance in weaponry), the fighting did not stop. In 1994 and 1995 Bosnian Serbs massacred residents in Sarajevo, Srebrenica, and other cities that the United Nations had in May 1993 deemed "safe havens" for Muslim civilians.

Neither NATO air strikes (beginning in April 1994) nor the cutoff of supplies from Serbia (as of August 1994) nor the cutoff of supplies from Serbia (as of August 1994) deterred the Bosnian Serbs, who blocked convoys of humanitarian aid and detained some of the 24,000 UN troops intended to stop hostilities. Like their allies in Serbia, the Bosnian Serbs wanted to unite all Serb-held lands of the former Yugoslavia. By September 1995, however, the Muslim-Croat alliance's conquests had reduced Serb-held territory in Bosnia from over two-thirds to just under one-half -- the percentage allocated in the peace plan for the Serb autonomous region. On December 14, 1995, the leaders of Bosnia, Croatia, and Serbia signed the Dayton peace accords, officially ending the wars in Bosnia and Croatia after about 250,000 people had died and more than 3 million others became refugees. NATO troops numbering 60,000 entered Bosnia to enforce the accords. In early 1998 about 30,000 NATO peacekeepers were still in Bosnia, which remained scarred by war and divided between the Muslim-Croat confederation and the Bosnian Serb region. Dozens of suspected war criminals had been indicted by the UN tribunal, including Bosnian Serb leader Radovan Karadzic (1945-) (who had resigned in June 1996), although many had not been arrested or tried.

War in Bosnia: Timeline

- 1990-91:** Croatia and Slovenia declare their independence from the Yugoslav Federated Republic. In Croatia ethnic Serbs and Croats begin a long, bloody conflict. UN imposes arms embargo on all members of the former Yugoslav Republic.
- April 1992:** Nationalist Serb snipers fire on peaceful demonstrators in Sarajevo, marking the beginning of the war. Bosnian Serb soldiers are formally discharged from the Yugoslav army, but allowed to keep all of their weapons.
- Summer 1992:** reports of "ethnic cleansing," a policy of slaughtering Muslim inhabitants of towns or driving them away, in order to create an ethnically pure region. Reports of concentration camps, mass rapes.
- Winter 1992-93:** Gas, water and electricity service are at best sporadic in Sarajevo. UN humanitarian convoys to Muslim enclaves in central Bosnia crowded with refugees are blocked by Serb forces leading to acute shortages of food, fuel, and medicine there. UN declares several Bosnian cities "safe havens" to no one's relief. Pres. Clinton orders humanitarian aid and food to be air lifted to those places.
- 1992-1993:** Many cease fires are broken. Vance-Owen peace treaty is first accepted by Milosevic and Karadzic, then rejected by the Bosnian Serb Parliament. Other peace treaties based on dividing Bosnia along ethnic lines are negotiated. Croats, originally fighting with the Muslims against the Serbs, start their own "ethnic cleansing" campaign.
- 1993:** Mortar barrages on Sarajevo lighten up, and Serbs withdraw from some strategic positions, when US and NATO threaten air strikes. Firing resumes when it becomes obvious that no action will be taken.
- January 1994:** France, which has the most UN troops in Bosnia, calls for NATO to use air strikes to relieve the humanitarian crisis in Bosnia. French philosopher, Bernard-Henri Levi, and other intellectuals start a party "Europe Begins at Sarajevo", for the elections for the European Parliament. The party's only platform is that Europe's humanity and civility is challenged by its inactivity in the Bosnia crisis.
- February 4, 1994:** The market place massacre, which leaves 68 people dead and over 200 wounded in Sarajevo ignites public outcry against this and other atrocities leading NATO to issue ultimatum for Serbs to withdraw their artillery to 20 km from Sarajevo, and for all warring parties to hand over their heavy weapons to UN observers.
- Fall 1994:** Cease fire around Sarajevo is unstable. Bosnian Serb forces are reinforced by Croatian Serb forces from the neighboring Krajina region, press against Bosnian government, re-recapturing the region around Bihac. Bihac is shelled and bombed relentlessly. NATO "strikes back" and bombs the runways in the Serb held airport in Krajina from which bombing raids are flown. Serbs hold over 300 UN troops hostage against further air raids.
- December 1994:** Former US President Jimmy Carter flies to Sarajevo to negotiate a 4 month cease fire with the warring parties. Cease fire does not affect Croat Serbs who continue the siege of Bihac.
- January 28, 1995:** 1000th day of the siege of Sarajevo.
- February, 1995:** Cease fire violations by Bosnian Serbs are increasingly common. UN monitors observe helicopters crossing from Serbia to Bosnia, presumably to resupply the Bosnian Serb positions, a breach of promise by Serbia's president Milosevic to put Bosnian Serbs under an internal embargo. Pres. Tudjman of Croatia asks for U.N. peacekeepers' withdrawal from Krajina, a hotly contested region in Croatia occupied mainly by Serbs. Fears of renewed fighting when U.N. withdraws in the spring of 1995 are ignited.
- February 13, 1995:** United Nations tribunal on human rights violation in the Balkans charges 21 Bosnian Serb commanders with genocide and crimes against humanity. This action marks the first time that a Western political body openly charged Serbs with genocide.
- February 15 - 22, 1995:** Under the pressures from European allies, U.S. agrees to loosen economic sanctions against Yugoslavia, in return for Pres. Milosevic's recognition of territorial integrity of Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina. Milosevic refuses.
- March 9, 1995:** According to New York Times, a CIA report completed earlier in the year has concluded that 90% of the acts of "ethnic cleansing" were carried out by Serbs and that leading Serbian politicians almost certainly played a role in the crimes. The report is believed to be the most comprehensive United States assessment of the atrocities in Bosnia.

LOVE THY NEIGHBOR: BOSNIAN DIARIES by ZIYAH GAFIC
Fovea Exhibitions Beacon Gallery
Opening Reception Saturday November 10 4-8pm



Photograph by ZIYAH GAFIC/ GETTY IMAGES

on view November 10- January 6
Friday, Saturday & Sundays 11-6pm

All events are free and open to the public

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