

Students in U.S. horrified by slaughter of kinfolk

(CPS)—For most college students, the war raging in the former country of Yugoslavia is the last thing on their mind when they take a test.

For Ismar Derzic, it's often the only thing on his mind.

"You try to concentrate but you can't," said Derzic, 20, a junior at the University of Texas at Austin (UT), who was raised in Sarajevo by his grandfathers and uncles. "I had a test in statistics. After 15 minutes, I could not concentrate. You're thinking about what's happening over there or what's going to happen. I just got up and left."

Derzic is not alone. Stories of family and friends being slaughtered or left starving by the war in the former Yugoslavia are causing other college students like Derzic to lose focus on their studies, even as they try to focus more Americans on the crisis.

Derzic's roommate and fellow UT student, Kenan Hadziahmetovic, 19, is plagued by stories of atrocities told to him by his parents in Austria, who keep in contact with friends and family in their homeland. He said Serbians are slaughtering his fellow Muslims in the name of "ethnic cleansing."

"There is genocide happening in Bosnia," said Hadziahmetovic, who also has relatives and friends back in Sarajevo. "There are thousands of stories I can tell you. Things that aren't human. Rippingspinal cords out. Women being raped. My mother told me that Serbian soldiers are distributing candy to the children and inside the bag is a bomb. The children come out to get the candy because they are starving and they blow up."

"The worst part about that is from my friends and family I have actual pictures of those things."

For at least one student, the stories of atrocities hit too close to home. In August, Aida Hamulic, 21, a junior at California Lutheran University in Thousand Oaks heard about the deaths of her mother's family.

"My mother's family was in a small town near Sarajevo," Hamulic said. "Serbian soldiers

came and took all the men out of their homes during dinner. My grandfather was shot. My two cousins were shot. One of my mother's cousins... they tortured him to death."

As a consequence of their anxiety about friends and family in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Hamulic, Hadziahmetovic and Derzic have watched their grades plummet.

"I was an A student. I never had any trouble. Ismar was the same," Hadziahmetovic said. "And right now we're both on the verge of getting C's, and, I hate to say it, D's."

While some professors have allowed the three students to retake tests, others have not been as sympathetic to their trauma.

"Some understand, and others really don't care," Hamulic said.

The war also has created financial hardship for Derzic and Hadziahmetovic. With their bank accounts in Sarajevo now frozen, Derzic applied for a scholarship. He was turned down. "As far as money is concerned, we're pretty low on it," Hadziahmetovic said.

Though they are faced with low grades and empty wallets, the students still have high hopes that they can make an impact on the struggle in Sarajevo. They have collected food and clothes to send back to their homeland and Hamulic has begun speaking at other Southern California colleges to raise student awareness.

While Derzic and Hadziahmetovic would like nothing more than to be with their families in Sarajevo during the holidays, they know that the most realistic wish they could have right now is that the United Nations will send a holiday package of peacekeeping troops and relief to Sarajevo.


"It's very hard to see how much pain and suffering is going on and nobody is willing to do anything about it," Hadziahmetovic said. "I just ask myself if a child's life in Kuwait is more valuable than a child's life in Bosnia."

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