Belvedere

*Belvedere*, 2010, Bosnia and Herzegovina

Bosnian, with subtitles in English
90 minutes

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ONE-PAGE SUMMARY: Before Screening

**SYNOPSIS**
Ruveyda is like most residents of the Belvedere refugee camp: a widow yearning to forget the tragedy of war, fifteen years after the ethnic cleansing of Bosnia and Herzegovina. But unlike those around her, she spends most of her days in a bittersweet routine of caring for her extended family, and searching for the remains of her husband and son—both of which offer a precarious hope that is one day tested when her nephew is selected to participate in a reality show in a former enemy enclave. An emotionally rich portrait of war’s troubled aftermath, director Ahmed Imamović’s film paints an uncommon image of patience, faith, love, and above all, forgiveness.

**CHARACTERS/(CAST)**
- **Ruveyda (Sadžida Šetić)**: A war widow caring for invalid brother and nephew in Belvedere
- **Aliya (Nermin Tulić)**: Ruveyda’s brother, a kind but brooding disabled diabetic
- **Zeyna (Minka [Emina] Muftić)**: Ruveyda’s sister, mother of Adnan (Ado)
- **Harun (Armin Rizavnić)**: Aliya’s loving and dutiful 10-year-old son
- **Adnan (Adis Omerović)**: Ruveyda’s good-natured, accordion-playing nephew, called Ado

**DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**
1. What is the relationship between the two worlds in the film (the one at the Belvedere camp and the one on the reality TV show)? What distinguishes them and what do they have in common?
2. How does the distinct use of black-and-white and color photography affect the way you think and feel about the story’s two settings?
3. Consider the specific obstacles Ruveyda faces in moving forward with her life. Can she overcome some obstacles but not others? Why or why not?
ABOUT THE DIRECTOR: Ahmed Imamović

DIRECTOR’S STATEMENT
This film is not about the war but about the consequences of the war.

I think it is even more difficult and gruesome to watch the effects of terror than the act of terror itself. It’s terribly humiliating to watch these women who cannot find the bones [of their murdered loved ones] after 15 years.

We unfortunately have a bloody past but we should not forget it. I’ll be very happy if the audience, in the 90 minutes of the film, feels the discomfort, the nausea that these women have been feeling for the past 15 years.*

BIOGRAPHY
Ahmed Imamović was born in Sarajevo in 1971. He majored in Directing at Sarajevo’s Academy of Performing Arts, and has worked as cameraman, assistant director and screenwriter for documentaries and commercials. His first feature film, Go West, won the Audience Award for Best Film at the 2006 Bosnian-Herzegovinian Film Festival in New York. Belvedere is his second feature film.

*Quotes by Ahmed Imamović excerpted from an interview with Reuters, Nov. 25, 2010.
www.reuters.com/article/idUSTRE6AO2UA20101125
FILM AESTHETICS

Film is unique as an art form in its synthesis of visual arts, writing, drama, movement and sound. The following notes about film aesthetics and technique suggest some things to watch and listen for while viewing Belvedere.

Framing and Editing
Framing refers to the composition of an image. This includes choices like the distance between the camera and a subject, the context in which a subject appears (alone or in a crowded room, for instance) and the angle at which we see a subject. Such compositional decisions affect how we interpret a scene. For example, close-ups may be used for dramatic emphasis and to create a feeling of intimacy; wide shots from a distance may emphasize a character’s relation to setting and/or allow only a detached, impersonal view of the character. A high angle looking down may make a character seem powerless or victimized, while a low angle looking up may make a character seem powerful or menacing. Equally important to the creation of meaning in a film is editing: the sequence of individual shots. A close-up of a desperate face glancing at a cluttered table, followed by a close-up of the gun on that table, can tell us what’s in the mind of the character. Thus, two discrete images, put together in a specific order, convey a third “unseen” image or idea.

Music and Sound
Music in a film’s soundtrack can be used to comment on or enhance a setting or action. Music often underscores, literally, the emotional significance of a scene, or merely sets a mood or establishes a particular atmosphere (cheerful, somber, dangerous, etc.). In film, music and image are always in a kind of dialogue with one another.

Natural sounds can add a dimension of reality or unreality to a scene. Off-screen sounds, such as traffic noise or gunshots, can contribute subtly or overtly to the narrative elements at work within the frame.

As his family sits around the television set watching Ado on the Big Brother reality show, the camera frames the television prominently in the center of the image and, most dramatically, shows the TV screen in bright, garish color against an otherwise muted black-and-white environment. The surreal contrast helps to underlie other contrasts of a thematic nature: the drab world of the camp stands in stark visual distinction to the alluring world on the television, which is made particularly exciting for the family because of the presence of one of their own inside that artificial world. Ado now bridges both worlds and in a sense brings his family (at least his mother and young cousin Harun) along with him. The blatant contrast seems to call into question the nature of “reality” for us: Is it the reality TV show or the stranded, black-and-white world of the camp that best corresponds to the world at large?

A chilling musical section augments a scene in which a “secondary mass grave” is excavated, as television cameras and witnesses (including Ruveyda) look on. Commentators speaking to the cameras offer differing interpretations of a doll found nearby with its mouth cut: one official involved in the search for mass graves calls it a warning sent by those who want them to stop looking, while another man insists it was probably just pushed up from the grave below by the movement of the soil. As they speak, the music has started quietly above a tense, pulsating beat. As the digging starts, the music gets much louder, and finally, as technicians dislodge bones from the excavated earth, a deep male voice enters the soundtrack with a keening sound that channels the horror of the scene, even as the workers and bystanders remain speechless. As the camera pulls away from the site, the music returns to a low pulse and fades away.
Belvedere

Dialogue
Dialogue refers to the spoken lines in a film, whether spoken “out loud” between characters or as internal monologues or narration to the audience. Dialogue helps give us the story. It also helps to situate the action by telling us what’s happened before and “off screen.” But how the dialogue is delivered often communicates much more than the literal information or meaning in the words themselves. For example, accents and word choice (including the use of slang) can say much about a character’s background or social position. Likewise, the fact that characters might use more than one language in a given conversation can suggest something about their backgrounds or the social setting. Thus, dialogue can serve several functions:

- It can help set the scene by explaining events leading up to it, or by describing something about the characters and their relationships with each other (this kind of dialogue, “exposing” the basis or background of a scene, is called exposition).
- It can serve to develop the relationships between characters.
- It can bring out or highlight indirectly some of the larger themes in the film as a whole.

At certain times we hear Ruveyda’s words in voiceover, as if she were speaking directly to us or to herself. It is in these moments almost exclusively that we hear her thoughts and her profound questions concerning the grief and injustice she bears. These passages help us better understand her circumstance and her behavior, including her last desperate act. The sorrowful words have a poetic ring to them, as if to suggest thoughts that come from the depths of her soul. “A lonely bird flies above me from corner to corner,” we hear her think as she brushes her hair at night in front of the mirror. “Will it ever dawn? Ever, dear God?” And, as if to suggest the way the war and its legacy have shaken her faith, she goes on: “The silent bird flies above me, from corner to corner, through the emptiness, here and there, there and here. What was the sin that deserved this huge and endless punishment?”

Narrative Structure
The narrative structure of a film establishes the order, or way in which the story progresses from its beginning to its end. The structure may be linear, running in a straight line chronologically from start to finish; it may be episodic, composed of a series of connected but also distinct sections; or it may even be circular, ultimately returning viewers to the beginning of the story, but with perhaps a new perspective on it. Visual and other metaphors are often employed throughout the narrative to underscore the meaning, or significance, of important parts of the story. Although a narrative usually centers on some problem or conflict inherent in the story, there is not necessarily a sense of resolution at the end of a film. In fact, the lack of resolution often spurs viewers to further consider the themes developed in the course of the narrative long after the film has ended.

Belvedere’s linear narrative involves a paralleling of stories, which brings into contrast two different models of community. The character of Ado—leaving the Bosniak refugee camp to be on a popular reality TV show about the challenges of communal living among diverse people—bridges these two worlds. The film’s visual style, with its alternating use of black-and-white and color photography, helps set the two worlds apart, but both are ultimately forms of limbo: one tragic and the other comical or absurd. In both, Ado is looking for a chance to live, to enjoy life and prosper as a human being, and escape the weight of the past—that lingering grief and uncertainty affecting his mother and the other adults around him. His hopes are dashed, however, since his chances on the TV show prove to depend even more on the real world than the world of “reality TV.” Nevertheless, the TV hostess, speaking the film’s final line, suggests the moral in both settings: “Life goes on. The show must not stop.”
NARRATIVE THEMES IN THE FILM BELVEDERE

Watch for scenes or events that correspond to a particular theme, making mental or written notes as to how the theme unfolds in the film. Note whether the film developed the theme as expected, and if not, what happened instead. Questions for each theme are designed to encourage discussion.

The casualties of war

1. What are the things that the characters in the Belvedere camp have lost? Name as many as you can.

2. How do the people get by financially in the refugee camp? Are there indications of the kinds of professions the characters once had, or might have had, if the war had not happened?

3. What is the nature of Aliya’s illness? If it has more than one cause, how many can you name?

4. “I wait for the guest to knock on my door. And I can do nothing,” says Ruveyda. “Whatever I touch, it just slips from my hands. And I can devote myself to absolutely nothing other than waiting for this guest to come.” What does Ruveyda mean by this statement?

Gender and generational differences

5. What do the men in the Belvedere camp do? How have the routines and responsibilities of the women in the camp been affected by the war?

6. One day Ruveyda and her sister go to town with Ado, who goes to an Internet café and surfs the web. What do Ruveyda and her sister do in town? What does this portion of the story suggest about the differences between Ado and his mother and aunt? Do they relate differently to the aftermath of war, and if so how?

7. The first image of the film is of Ruveyda walking left to right under a big, cloud-filled sky. The last image of the film is of Ado walking, also left to right, out of the TV show and back into a black-and-white world. Explain the connection and contrast between these two scenes, Ruveyda and Ado, and what is at stake for both of them as representatives of the Bosniak community.

Justice and reconciliation

8. Ruveyda stalks a man named Dragan Obradovic in Srebrenica. Who is he and what does she want from him? Are her actions right or wrong in your opinion, and why?

9. Did Ruveyda’s final act surprise you? Why or why not?

10. Despite the violence in the film, can you identity other aspects of the story that give you hope for the future of the refugees at the Belvedere camp and others like them elsewhere?

11. How, in your opinion, should the violence leveled at the inhabitants of Srebrenica during the war be dealt with by society at large? What are some ways a community of people, like those in the Belvedere camp, can heal and move forward? How have other communities and societies, throughout world history, dealt with similar acts of violence and genocide?
“Real life”

12. What is the point of the reality show, *Big Brother*? Who are the contestants and what’s the nature of the contest as far as you can tell?

13. How much reality does the show *Big Brother* contain, in your view? In particular, does it have anything in common with the life Ado leaves back at Belvedere, and if so, what?

14. Do reality shows or other forms of popular entertainment have the power to affect meaningful social change? Can you think of any examples that support your answer?

15. The word “belvedere” literally means “beautiful view.” Why do you think the camp is named this? And how, if at all, does the meaning change when it also serves as the title of the film?

**Models of authority**

16. Both Ruveyda and her brother Aliya seem to object to watching the TV show *Big Brother* after Ado joins the cast as a contestant. What is their objection to watching the show? Do you sympathize with their position? Why or why not?

17. On the reality show, “Big Brother” is the all-seeing voice of appeal and the single voice of authority. But is that the only thing regulating behavior on the set? What do you think happens when a diverse group of strangers such as this begins to live together? Try to apply examples from your own experience in support of your answer.

18. A scene starting on the *Big Brother* set, in which Big Brother announces certain decisions and punishments, is inter-cut with a scene in which Ruveyda sits before a judge in the Municipal Court of Srebrenica (in the Serb-controlled Republika Srpska, one of Bosnia and Herzegovina’s two main political entities). How does this contrast between the two scenes affect you as a viewer? What might the filmmaker be suggesting by contrasting these scenes in this way?
PROFILE OF BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

FULL NAME: Bosnia and Herzegovina

SIZE: 51,197 sq km (19,767 sq mi)

POPULATION: 3,879,296 (July 2012 est.)

CAPITAL: Sarajevo

GOVERNMENT: Emerging federal democratic republic

RELIGIONS: Muslim 40%, Orthodox 31%, Roman Catholic 15%, other 14%

ETHNIC GROUPS: Bosniak 48%, Serb 37.1%, Croat 14.3%, other 0.6% (2000 est.)
(Not: Bosniak has replaced Muslim as an ethnic term in part to avoid confusion with the religious term Muslim [i.e., an adherent of Islam])

LANGUAGES: Bosnian (official), Croatian (official), Serbian

LITERACY: 97.9% (age 15 and over can read and write); 99.4% (men); 96.5% (women) (2010 est.)

UNEMPLOYMENT RATE: 43.3% (2011 est.)

GEOGRAPHY & CLIMATE: Slightly smaller than West Virginia, with a 20 km coastline, the country of Bosnia and Herzegovina is covered with mountains and valleys. It generally has hot summers and cold winters; with areas of high elevation having short, cool summers and long, severe winters. Winters are mild and rainy along the coast. (Note: Within Bosnia and Herzegovina’s recognized borders, the country is divided into a joint Bosniak/Croat Federation [about 51% of the territory] and the Bosnian Serb-led Republika Srpska or RS [about 49% of the territory]; the region called Herzegovina is contiguous to Croatia and Montenegro, and traditionally has been settled by an ethnic Croatian majority in the west and an ethnic Serbian majority in the east.)

CURRENT ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES: Air pollution from metallurgical plants; limited number of sites for urban waste disposal; water shortages and destruction of infrastructure because of the 1992-95 civil strife; deforestation.

(Source: CIA World Factbook)
BACKGROUND

Bordering Croatia, Montenegro and Serbia and the Adriatic Sea, Bosnia and Herzegovina is a small, mountainous, picturesque country on the Balkan Peninsula in Southeastern Europe. Since prehistoric times, humans have populated the region, which has long been a vital nexus of traffic and trade between the Near East and Europe (resulting in a rich cultural landscape that includes some of Europe’s oldest cities and has produced great accomplishments in artistic and intellectual realms). Its location between larger competing geographic powers and its mountainous geography have contributed to a history of civil conflict and distinctive cultural histories throughout the nation, reflecting the overall fragmented nature of the Balkan region (“the Balkans”).

The nation’s present-day population is roughly four million and is comprised of three principle ethnic groups: Bosniaks (Bosnian Muslims), Croats and Serbs. Bosniaks, the largest of these three groups, make up about half the population, while Serbs are the next largest group. “Herzegovinian” and “Bosnian” are general regional terms applied to the inhabitants, rather than ethnic distinctions. As a region, Herzegovina (which means “duke’s land”) has no exact borders but refers to the southern part of the country, while Bosnia (a name derived from the Bosna River) encompasses the larger northern portion.

About half the total population of Bosnia and Herzegovina was displaced during the devastating Bosnian War of 1992–95, a civil conflict that erupted at the end of the Cold War, after the breakup of the former Yugoslavia and the move by Bosnia and Herzegovina (in 1991) to become an independent state. Of the estimated 200,000 people who died in the war, the vast majority were civilians. Today Bosnia and Herzegovina is an independent nation under international administration, backed by peacekeeping forces from the European Union, striving to put itself on a sound footing socially, economically and politically despite the persistence of ethnic tensions and the various wounds of war.

Prehistoric cultures and civilizations There are traces of human civilization in the region now known as Bosnia and Herzegovina reaching back millennia, to the Paleolithic Period, otherwise known as the Stone Age (roughly 10,000–200,000 years ago). The region also has many archeological artifacts from the following Bronze and Iron Ages. The Butmir Culture, for example, which was a Neolithic society that flourished from 2600 to 2400 BC, left behind a unique legacy of ceramic work near modern-day Sarajevo and is one of the most studied of these ancient cultures. Farming came to the region during the Neolithic Period and was widespread by 4000 BC. The Neolithic peoples of the region crafted pottery, simple textiles, a variety of tools, and houses of wood or mud. They also planted cereal grains, raised livestock, fished and hunted.

The Illyrian tribes Sometime around 1000 BC, a group of tribes sharing a common, now-extinct Indo-European language known as Illyrian came to occupy the Western Balkans. The Illyrians gave rise to several Balkan kingdoms, and classical Illyrian culture centered in Herzegovina, where it incorporated a strong Greek influence (the ancient Greeks built the first trade routes through the Balkans after about 600 BC). Illyrians were likewise influenced by ancient Celtic, Roman and eventually Slavic cultures. The Greeks and Romans identified a large swath of the Balkans as “Illyria,” and described the Illyrians as a warlike and unpredictable people. Illyrian piracy in the Adriatic Sea contributed to Rome’s decision to launch a series of military campaigns known as the Illyrian Wars in the third and second centuries BC. The Roman Emperor Augustus eventually succeeded in conquering the land in the first century AD, and divided Illyria into a northern province, known as Pannonia, and a southern one known as Dalmatia. Various outsiders over the years have applied the term “Illyrians” to describe different sets of Balkan peoples. A Croatian nationalist movement in the mid-19th century, for example, adopted the term in an ultimately unsuccessful attempt to unite South Slavs for independence from the Habsburg (Austro-Hungarian) Empire.
Rome leaves a profound legacy in the Balkans After Augustus subdued the Illyrians, Roman culture permeated the region for at least five centuries. Perhaps Rome’s most significant legacy to the region, however, was the eventual division of the empire into two spheres, the Byzantine and the Roman, or the Eastern and Western Roman Empires, respectively. This amounted to a major cultural and political divide that would pit Eastern Orthodox Christianity against Western Roman Catholic power, and correspondingly, (Orthodox) Serbs against (Roman Catholic) Croats and Slovenes.

Slavs and Avars arrive in the Balkans beginning in the sixth century The Slavic peoples known as South Slavs (speaking South Slavic languages) live mainly in the Balkans. South Slavs include Bosniaks, Bulgarians, Croats, Macedonians, Montenegrins, Serbs and Slovenes. Slavic migration into the Balkans began in the sixth century. A nomadic confederacy of Eurasian tribes called the Avars also arrived around this time. Avar influence persisted until the ninth century. Over this period, Avar and Slavic cultures merged through intermarriage, and traces of this Avar-Slavic culture are visible in material artifacts studied by scholars. Avar identity itself died out after the capitulation of the Avar Empire to the Frankish and Bulgarian Empires in the eighth and ninth centuries. Croats and Serbs settled in present-day Bosnia and Herzegovina in the seventh century.

Croatian, Serbian, Bulgarian and Byzantine rulers all vied for political and religious dominance over many generations. Hungary finally secured power after the Hungarian and Croatian Crowns merged. But throughout this period, foreign interference aggravated local political and religious hostilities and set off civil wars. Among the religious groups in the region at this time were the Bogomils. Bogomilism was a Christian sect embraced by Bosnian rulers such as Ban Kulín (1180–1204) who sought greater autonomy for Bosnia. The Bogomils drew the ire of the Catholic papacy, and were a target of Hungary’s Catholic kings who wanted to bring Bosnia under Hungarian control. Despite serious persecution, however, Bogomilism survived into the 15th century.

Ban Stefan Tvrtko I attempts to unite South Slavs under one rule in the 14th century In 1353, Bosnia came under the rule of Stefan Tvrtko I, who turned it into a powerful state joined with the principality of Hum (in what later became Herzegovina). Tvrtko, called Ban (“lord” or “ruler”), became King of Bosnia and Raska in 1377, after the fall of the Serbian Nemanja dynasty. Tvrtko went on to conquer parts of Croatia and Dalmatia in his bid to unite all South Slavs under his rule. After Tvrtko’s death in 1391, Bosnia and Herzegovina played host to competing nobles and religious groups vying for control of the region.

Bosnia and Herzegovina begins four centuries under the Ottoman Empire Most of Bosnia, the northern region of today’s Bosnia and Herzegovina, came under the rule of the Muslim Ottoman Empire in 1463. Herzegovina followed in 1483. The Turkish conquest introduced Islam to the region (which was especially absorbed by elites, while peasants tended to remain Christian), and led to an exodus of Orthodox and Roman Catholics. Nobles of the Bogomil religion instead converted to Islam and thereby retained their lands and privileges. This Slavic Muslim aristocracy became increasingly hardnosed as it ruled over the Christian and Muslim peasantry. The Turks themselves, meanwhile, rarely settled in the region, preferring to govern Bosnia and Herzegovina from afar in Travnik and Mostar. The region suffered an economic decline over time, while large estates replaced small farms and peasants were increasingly taxed to cover the military expenses of the Ottoman sultanate. By the 17th century, with the Ottoman Empire on the wane, Bosnia and Herzegovina fell into the middle of a power struggle among the Turks, the Russians and the Austrians. In the end, Bosnia and Herzegovina remained part of the Ottoman Empire for more than four centuries.

Bosnia comes under the wing of the Austro-Hungarian Empire as the Ottoman Empire fades The power of the Ottoman Empire began to wane in the 18th and 19th centuries, in part as a result of pressure from Austria. There were revolts by Christian peasants against Slavic Muslim landlords, and these landholders
violence including concentration camps and massacres to exterminate, expel or forcibly convert Orthodox Serbs

Austro-Hungarian occupation further spurs Balkan nationalism and sparks World War I Following the Treaty of Berlin in 1878, Austria-Hungary occupied Bosnia and Herzegovina, suppressing Muslim and Orthodox opposition (though the region remained technically Turkish states). Looking to increase the number of Catholics in the land, Austria-Hungary colonized northern Bosnia with Catholic Slavs and Germans. Austria-Hungary’s administration of Bosnia and Herzegovina (under Baron Benjamin Kállay) improved the economic situation and built roads, railways and schools. At the same time, however, it exploited the nationalist divisions among Muslim Slavs, Catholic Croats and Orthodox Serbs. Tensions escalated in 1908 when Austria-Hungary formally annexed the region, provoking a crisis with Turkey and military mobilization by Serbia. Russia came in on the side of Serbia. The outcome of the Bosnian Crisis of 1908-09 was a humiliating retreat for Serbia and Russia, engendering further resentment at Austro-Hungarian rule throughout the Balkans, especially in Bosnia and Herzegovina. On June 28, 1914, a Bosnian Serb and Yugoslav nationalist named Gavrilo Princip assassinated the Austrian Archduke Franz Ferdinand, heir to the Austro-Hungarian throne, while Ferdinand was on a visit to the Bosnian capital of Sarajevo. The fallout from this action precipitated the outbreak of World War I, as the network of alliances between European powers were jolted into action on either side of the ensuing controversy. At the end of the war, Serbia annexed Bosnia as part of a new Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, renamed Yugoslavia in 1929.

After World War I South Slavs unite in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia The Kingdom of the Serbs, Croats and Slovenes—later renamed the Kingdom of Yugoslavia—existed from 1918 to 1941. It was formed after World War I from territories of the former Austro-Hungarian Empire, along with the formerly independent Kingdom of Serbia, and encompassed most of the Austrian Slovenian lands, Croatia, most of Dalmatia, Serbia, Montenegro, Vojvodina, Kosovo, the Serbian-controlled parts of Macedonia and Bosnia and Herzegovina. Strong ethnic, religious, linguistic and cultural divides exacerbated the debate between Serbs and Croats over what form of government the state should take (centralized or federated). Christian Orthodox, Roman Catholic, Islamic, Uniate, Jewish and Protestant faiths were all well-established in the region and they cut across ethnic and territorial lines. The creation of Yugoslavia fulfilled a longstanding dream of many intellectuals for a single South Slavic state that would unite 12 million people and their disparate cultures in a new country. But many saw the new nation as inherently artificial, exploitative and secondary to more immediate ethnic loyalties and traditions. Meanwhile, there were territorial disputes with a number of European powers, with Italian claims on Balkan lands the most serious threat (Italy had already taken the Croatian seaport of Rijeka by force in 1921). By 1939, the looming war in Europe convinced the Serbs and Croats to reach an agreement, but by then it was too late.

World War II leads to the occupation of Bosnia and Herzegovina under a vicious German client state With the outbreak of World War II, the Axis Powers (Germany, Italy, Hungary and Bulgaria) invaded, occupied and split up Yugoslavia beginning in April 1941. Germany created a puppet “Independent State of Croatia” (NDH) that joined Bosnia and Herzegovina to Croatia and northern Slovenia. Germany put its client state under the control of the Ustaša, a Croatian fascist organization. The ultranationalist Ustaše used extreme violence including concentration camps and massacres to exterminate, expel or forcibly convert Orthodox
Serbs, Jews, Romani people (Gypsies) and Communist Croats. Some Croatian Catholic clergy, including the archbishop of Sarajevo, embraced the new state and its extreme attacks on its two million Serbian, Jewish and Romani inhabitants, while other Catholic clergy condemned the atrocities. The slaughter was so extreme that Germany feared it would ignite Serbian resistance, and Italy finally took over areas of Herzegovina to stem the violence. Organized resistance to the occupation grew partly from Serbs fleeing this genocidal campaign in Croatia and in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Serbian resistance groups organized under the name Chetnik, from the Serbian word for “detachment.” Some were monarchists or nationalists, while others supported the Communist-led guerrillas. The anti-communist Colonel Draza Mihajlovic was the most famous Chetnik leader, appointed head of the armed forces in 1942 by Yugoslavia’s government-in-exile. The Independent State of Croatia (NDH) ceased to exist in May 1945, driven out by revolutionary and statesman Josip Broz Tito’s partisan forces and the Soviet Red Army.

**Yugoslavia reunites under Communist rule at the end of the war** Yugoslavia liberated itself in 1945, establishing the Democratic Republic of Yugoslavia, which later became the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. Bosnia and Herzegovina became one of the six constituent republics of the new state. The war left 1.7 million Yugoslavs dead—the majority of those having been killed by fellow Yugoslavs—and the country’s infrastructure in shambles. Starvation was widespread. Having led the successful Yugoslav Partisans in resistance against the fascists during the war, Tito oversaw the rebuilding of multi-ethnic Yugoslavia after the devastation wrought by World War II. His early authoritarian rule was geared toward modeling the new multinational state after the Soviet Union. But Tito, an ardent Yugoslav nationalist, soon became the first Communist leader to challenge the Soviet Union’s dominance over Eastern Europe, resisting Yugoslav incorporation into the Soviet-dominated Eastern bloc and promoting a “non-aligned” movement of countries amid the Cold War contest dominated by the U.S. and USSR. Entrenched ethnic rivalries in places like Bosnia and Herzegovina were largely suppressed under the Communist period, only to resurface when the federation began to come apart in 1990.

**The breakup of Yugoslavia quickly leads to several Balkan conflicts, including the Bosnian War** Ultranationalists came to power in the November 1990 elections in Bosnia and Herzegovina. By 1992, the region had descended into political chaos. The war that raged between 1992 and 1995 displaced roughly half the population of Bosnia (about two million people). The war broke out after Bosnia and Herzegovina moved to become independent of the new Yugoslav Federation. Ethnic Serbs, who had boycotted the referendum on independence in March 1992, rose in armed resistance to the move (with support from Serbia and Montenegro), seeking to partition the country along ethnic lines and create a “Greater Serbia.” Radovan Karadzic was president of the self-styled Bosnian Serb Republic and commanded its army during the bloody conflict. Among the three warring ethnic groups, Bosniaks and Croats reached a settlement with one another in 1994, creating a Bosniak/Croat Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina. A final halt to the war came with the signing of the U.S.-brokered Dayton Agreement near Dayton, Ohio, on November 21, 1995. The war was one of several violent conflicts between 1991 and 1995 that erupted in the aftermath of the collapse of the former Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, conflicts collectively known as the Yugoslav Wars, characterized by bitter ethnic rivalries and war crimes, including ethnic cleansing. Led by ultranationalist Radovan Karadzic, Bosnia’s Serb faction committed the majority of the war’s atrocities as it sought to fuse disjointed territories populated or claimed by Serbs through systematic ethnic cleansing, especially of the majority Bosniak population, using genocide and forced removal of Bosniak populations. The United Nations imposed sanctions on Serbia as evidence mounted of atrocities inflicted upon the civilian population. In the summer of 1995, NATO forces intervened, allowing the Croat and Muslim forces, discreetly armed and trained by Germany and the U.S., to retake much of the Serb-occupied territory in Bosnia. American diplomacy brokered a deal that divided Bosnia almost equally between Serbs and a Muslim-Croat federation. By the end, about 200,000 people had died in the war.
The 1995 Dayton Agreement formally ends the war and sets up a complex governing apparatus. The Dayton Peace Accords established a Bosniak-Croat Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, and a Bosnian Serb Republic, or Republika Srpska. Each governing entity has its own president, parliament, police and other bodies. Dayton also set up a central Bosnian government with a rotating presidency in Sarajevo (which had suffered a brutal 44-month siege during the war), and in the self-governing district of Brcko, a neutral area under joint Serb, Croat and Bosniak authority. Ultimate authority, meanwhile, rests with the Office of the High Representative (OHR), which is charged with implementing Dayton’s provisions and has the power to “compel the entity governments to comply with the terms of the peace agreement and the state constitution.” Peace has been maintained under Dayton, and a number of war criminals (though by no means all) have been brought to trial in the international criminal court. But Dayton has also been met with criticism by some who see the separate governing entities as too autonomous, which therefore reinforces separatism instead of integration among the different ethnic groups. From 1995 to 1996, 60,000 NATO-led peacekeepers were stationed in Bosnia and Herzegovina. A smaller stabilization force, there to prevent any renewal of hostilities, later replaced these troops. And in 2004, European Union peacekeepers (EUFOR) replaced the stabilization force. The number of these EUFOR troops has steadily been reduced since then, with about 2000 remaining at the end of 2009.

First postwar elections take place in 1996. The first elections to take place under the terms of the Dayton Peace Accords were held in October 1996. The elections brought to power the three leading nationalist parties representing the three main ethnic groups: the Party of Democratic Action (KCD) represents the Bosniaks, alongside the Serb Democratic Party (SDS) and the Croat Democratic Party (HDZ). Attempts by the international community to encourage more moderate political parties that might lead the country further toward reintegration as well as membership in the European Union and NATO have proved less than successful, though some opposition parties have emerged since 2000. The first elections to be organized internally (as opposed to under administration and supervision by the international community) were held in 2002.
BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA TODAY

Government in Bosnia is divided between two entities The Dayton Agreement established two regional governing bodies inside Bosnia and Herzegovina: the Republika Srpska, which elects a president and national assembly, and the Bosniak-Croat Federation (or Muslim-Croat Federation), which elects a national assembly only. At the same time, a central government based in Sarajevo oversees national affairs such as foreign trade and economic policy. It is headed by a three-person executive office and has a national assembly in which two-thirds of the seats go to candidates from the Bosniak-Croat Federation and one-third to candidates from Republika Srpska.

The country’s stagnating economy remains a basic challenge In addition to widespread violence and physical displacement, the war of 1992-95 wreaked havoc on the economy of the country, causing an enormous rise in unemployment and a very steep drop (80%) in production. Output initially rebounded after the war, but then slowed from 2000 to 2002, with more modest increases thereafter. Official economic statistics do not, however, reflect the burgeoning black market sector. The global economic crisis in 2009 reduced exports and produced negative economic growth. Unemployment, which stood at 43% in 2011, remains the greatest economic problem facing the country. Over the last decade, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) has made loans to the government totaling around $250 million. But this funding is linked to increasing privatization of the once-socialist economy, and underscores the continuing challenges the government faces as it reduces its ample public sector and social benefits spending in securing such financial assistance.

Radovan Karadzic, arrested in 2008, faces trial Radovan Karadzic was arrested in July 2008 after almost 13 years of evading authorities who sought to bring war crimes charges against the former Bosnian Serb leader. He had been living in disguise and under a false name in Belgrade, working as a New Age healer. Handed over to the United Nations’ International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia, his trial opened in October 2009 in The Hague (Netherlands). Karadzic is accused of responsibility for atrocities that have been called the worst in Europe since the Second World War. The 11 charges against him include genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity. The 64-year-old Karadzic initially boycotted the trial for several months. It was still underway as of early 2011.

General Ratko Mladić remains at large A major war criminal of the Bosnian War, Ratko Mladić, former Chief of Staff of the Bosnian Serb Army (Army of the Republika Srpska), remains at large. The International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia issued an international arrest warrant for Mladić in 1995. Mladić stands accused of genocide, crimes against humanity and numerous war crimes, including crimes in relation to the attack on the UN Safe Area of Srebrenica in July 1995. In 2000, the fugitive Mladić reportedly attended a football game in Belgrade, but most of the time he lives in hiding. Like the Bosnian Serb character who Ruveyda stalks in Belvedere, there are other suspected war criminals who have eluded arrest or indictment.

Local elections in 2008 demonstrate continuing ethnic divisions In local elections in 2008, strong showings for nationalist parties among all three of Bosnia’s ethnic groups pointed to the continuing ethnic divisions in the country. Suspicion and widespread political apathy have been further aggravated by the complex protocols of the Dayton Agreement. Nevertheless, peace has been maintained under the postwar settlement.

Natural beauty and a vibrant culture draw tourists back to Bosnia and Herzegovina Today, Bosnia and Herzegovina still bears the legacy of its civil war in the early 1990s. This includes a still-fractured infrastructure and a large number of landmines in some areas of the countryside. Despite the deep scars of
Bosnia and Herzegovina is a country rich in natural beauty, history and culture, and is re-emerging as a major destination for tourists from around the world. Among the country’s natural wonders are the famous Kravica waterfalls, on the Trebizat River southeast of Ljubuški in the Herzegovina region. The region also includes an internationally significant bird reserve at Hutovo Blato, and an impressive cave system named Vjetrenica, near the border of Croatia, with a unique ecosystem that is still being explored. One of Bosnia and Herzegovina’s oldest national parks, Sutjeska National Park, contains a large swath of splendid, untouched wilderness in the eastern part of the country near the border with Montenegro, including one of the last two primeval forests in all of Europe. Bosnia and Herzegovina’s many popular cities and towns include Neum on the Adriatic Sea, the only town along the country’s short coastline and a leading tourist destination. Other top destinations for internationals and locals alike include the cities of Sarajevo and Mostar. The cosmopolitan capital city of Sarajevo (site of the 1984 Winter Olympic Games) is an impressive nexus of diverse cultures. Set in the center of the country in a valley beneath the Dinaric Alps near the banks of the Miljacka River, it includes a lively café and bar culture; many theaters, cinemas and music venues; and a popular Muslim-style bazaar. Mostar, the largest city in the Herzegovina region, is a picturesque, historic town developed by the Ottomans in the 15th and 16th centuries, and by Austria-Hungary several centuries later. It is named after its impressive Ottoman-era sloping bridge (Stari Most).

**Popular culture remains strong** The popular culture of Bosnia and Herzegovina has rebounded significantly since the war. For example, the country contains many notable filmmakers, including internationally renowned Serbian filmmaker Emir Kusturica (director of 1995’s *Underground*) and Bosniak filmmaker Đaniš Tanović (winner of an Academy Award for the 2001 film *No Man’s Land*). Moreover, the Sarajevo Film Festival has become the biggest and most important film festival in Southeast Europe since its founding (during the siege of the city) in 1995. Music in Bosnia and Herzegovina draws on an eclectic range of traditional forms as well as contemporary world styles. Folk music styles include *ganga*, *rera* and *sevdalinka*. One of the best-known Bosnian musicians and modern composers is Goran Bregović (b. 1950), who has worked with such world-renowned contemporaries as Iggy Pop and Cesária Évora, and has scored films for Kusturica and others. Theatre is a vibrant area of cultural production as well. Among the region’s rich literary inheritance is the work of novelist/playwright/essayist/journalist Branislav Nušić (1864-1938), who among other things, was the first director of the country’s National Theater, founded in Sarajevo in 1919. Soccer remains the most popular sport, although the country, which famously played host to the 1984 Winter Olympics, has produced many accomplished athletes in various fields. Bosnia and Herzegovina holds a gold medal in paralympic volleyball from the 2004 Summer Paralympics. The team included players who lost their legs in the Bosnian War.
REFERENCES FROM THE FILM

Refugee camps  About half the population of Bosnia and Herzegovina was displaced during the Bosnian War. Most displacement remained internal, although hundreds of thousands fled the country. Of those who remained, many ended up in refugee camps like the one depicted in the film. Economic breakdown as a result of the war and continuing ethnic tensions have contributed to the difficulties in reintegrating this displaced population into society at large. Tens of thousands remain in temporary shelters. “In South-Eastern Europe, there are still nearly 200,000 persons displaced by the conflicts of the early 1990s in Croatia and in Bosnia and Herzegovina,” according to the website of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, which provides aid and assistance to refugees. “UNHCR hopes that 2011, two decades after the outbreak of conflict, will mark the end of that displacement chapter.”

Srebrenica  Each day we see Ruveyda travel by bus from the Belvedere refugee camp past a sign for the town of Srebrenica. There she stalks the home of a former military commander of the Bosnian Serb Army. Srebrenica is a small town in the mountains of eastern Bosnia and Herzegovina. It was an important center of trade in the Balkans during the Middle Ages. The largely Catholic population at that time began converting to Islam after Srebrenica was incorporated into the Ottoman Empire in 1440. Located about 10 miles from the Drina River border with Serbia, the town lies in the Bosnian Serb’s Republika Srpska in the Drina Valley. During the Bosnian War, Srebrenica and its surroundings were deemed a prize to Serbian Nationalists seeking to construct a “Greater Serbia.” Serbian forces occupied the town after the outbreak of war in April 1992. A Serbian policy of forcible transfer (or ethnic cleansing) ensued, aimed at the Drina Valley’s majority Bosniak (Bosnian Muslim) population. Bosniak resistance forces took back the town, which drew Bosniak refugees from across the region. The United Nations declared the town and its surroundings a UN Safe Area in 1993, deploying a small UN peacekeeping force to defend it, but Bosnian Serb forces nevertheless laid siege to the town and region, capturing Srebrenica in 1995. At this time, Srebrenica became site of a notorious massacre known as the Srebrenica Massacre or the Srebrenica Genocide (see below).

Srebrenica Massacre  The scene detailing the excavation of a mass grave (as Ruveyda and other widows look on) graphically depicts the lingering horrors and mystery surrounding what became known as the Srebrenica Massacre. In July 1995, Bosnian Serb forces separated male members of Bosnian Muslim families and systematically killed more than 7000 men and boys over a two-week period, dumping the bodies in mass graves. Despite having been declared a UN Safe Area in 1993—and despite the presence of a Dutch UN peacekeeping battalion—Srebrenica became the site of the worst mass killing of the entire war. More than 15 years later, as the film suggests, there are thousands of Srebrenica women still searching for missing loved ones. Moreover, investigators continue to exhume bodies from these mass graves, and continue to discover details of what led to the worst massacre in Europe since World War II.

Belgrade  Ado travels to Belgrade, the political and cultural capital of Serbia, for the Big Brother reality show. One of Europe’s oldest cities, Belgrade is located at the confluence of the Danube and Sava rivers, on the Balkan Peninsula. Serbia’s largest city, Belgrade’s population of 1.6 million people includes many nationalities besides its Serbian majority.
Real Serbian “reality” show Although the Big Brother reality TV show depicted in the film is fictional, a Serbian radio and television “reality” program launched in 2009 with the mission of reuniting families and friends who had been separated during and after the conflicts of the 1990s in the former Yugoslavia. Called Potraga (“The Search”), the program is produced in Belgrade, and encourages its audience to become “citizen journalists” who use the show’s information and testimonials to help reunite former Yugoslavs with their loved ones. In this way, the show seeks to foster a sense of community among its viewers.

International Commission on Missing Persons The cars and uniforms of officials arriving to deliver news or, at one point, human remains to the widows in Belvedere camp bear the initials “ICMP.” This stands for the International Commission on Missing Persons. ICMP was established in 1996 by an initiative of U.S. President Bill Clinton to support the Dayton Agreement (see above). Based in Sarajevo, ICMP helps facilitate cooperation among governments and supports other organizations in the process of locating and identifying the remains of those who disappeared during the war. Since its founding, ICMP has expanded its mission beyond the countries of the former Yugoslavia. Effective use of DNA testing has made ICMP the largest identification project in the world. Today, ICMP contributes to recovery and identification efforts in regions devastated by war and human rights abuses, as well as by natural disasters like the 2004 Indian Ocean Tsunami and Hurricane Katrina.

The three-fingered salute As Ruvyda stops to pray at a Bosniak graveyard on her way back from court, a small boy with an ice cream walks up and holds up three fingers on his right hand. The gesture obviously upsets Ruvyda: the three-fingered sign is a popular gesture used largely by ethnic Serbs and is associated with Serbian nationalism. Its origins are unclear, but Vuk Drašković, leader of Serbia’s Serbian Renewal Movement, a nationalist political party, revived it before the outbreak of war in the early 1990s.
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