

Ethnic Cleansing Cleansed

—by Doug Hostetter

On Saturday, August 1, 500 Muslim refugees from Kozarac (Koz-a-retz) in northwestern Bosnia made their second foray across the line between Bosnian Government and Bosnian Serb areas. They had come to clean. They were accompanied by the members of the FOR international work camp, who had been specially invited for the occasion.

For five hours the city was filled with busy people armed with brooms, dustpans, and shovels. Refugees cleared the dirt, weeds, and broken glass from the streets of their city. Many moved on to start clearing rubble from their burned-out homes, abandoned for the past six years.

Kozarac's former residents have been slowly returning to Bosnia, settling in Sanski Most and other Bosnian Government-controlled areas not far from their former town. The refugees, most of whom are Muslim, formed a committee which issued a call on Bosnian radio for Kozarac citizens to come home and clean things up. The action was not organized by the UN, SFOR, or either government. It belonged to the former residents themselves. A UN car drove through the town several times during the first clean-up, as did a Serbian Police car; during the second, a truckload of armed Serb soldiers passed through — and had a drink in the local bar. No one made any attempt to stop this people's movement for cleaning and healing. Since the end of the war in Bosnia two and a half years ago, this is the first successful large-scale return of refugees to areas where they would now be ethnic minorities.

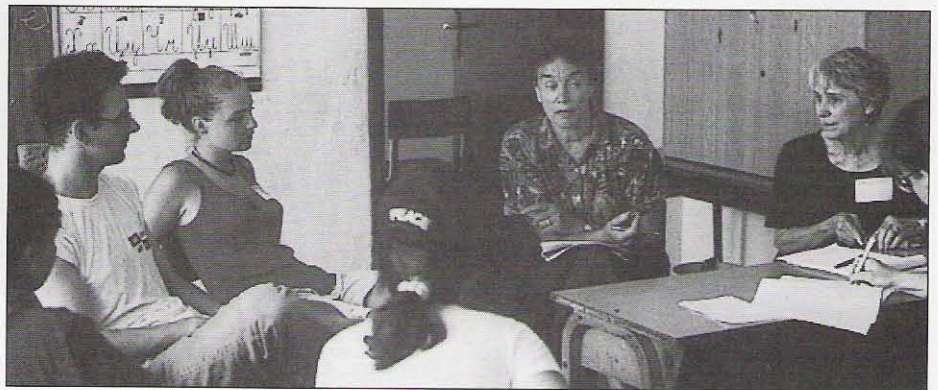
In May of 1992, Bosnian Serbs with the help of the Yugoslav Army surrounded and attacked the town of Kozarac, the 700-year-old home of 8,000 people. The town was more than ninety percent Muslim, with minority populations of Croats, Serbs, Gypsies, Hungarians, Albanians, Italians, and others. There was no Bosnian army in Kozarac: after two days of shelling, it was occupied. Non-Serb inhabitants were distributed to five concentration camps,

The Kozarac/FOR work camp.

Dolores Gunter, far right, teaching how to teach English to 137 local students, Prijedor, Bosnian Serb Republic.



PHOTOS: DOUG HOSTETTER



scenes of some of the worst atrocities of the war. After bringing townspeople from the camps to witness the destruction, the Bosnian Serb Army burned every non-Serb home: nine-tenths of the town.

More than a third of the original inhabitants of Kozarac were killed during the initial shelling, perished in the concentration camps, or have disappeared. The survivors made their way across the battle-lines into Bosnia or Croatia, then were scattered as refugees around the world.

Kozarac is located in the part of Bosnia presently controlled by the Bosnian Serb entity. The few former Serb residents of Kozarac have now resumed their homes. (They include the family of Dusan Tadic, the first Bosnian Serb to be convicted of war crimes at the International War Crimes Tribunal at the Hague.) However, attempts by the Bosnian Serb Government to repopulate Kozarac with Serb refugees from Croatia or other parts of Bosnia has failed, since the housing stock of the town has largely been destroyed. Only the elementary school, which had not been

ruined, has attracted Serb refugees from other areas. Today Kozarac is a city of brick remnants overgrown by thickets of vegetation.

The few Serbs who live in Kozarac were surprised to see their Muslim neighbors back in town. Dusan Tadic's brother cautiously came out and extended his hand to a Muslim neighbor whom he had not seen for six years, while one of the Serb refugees who lives nearby hurried to get his truck to help his new neighbors haul away the rubble from their homes and streets. The men in the group worked for several hours, while the women built fires and cooked. After a big meal, to which all were invited, the "old residents" of Kozarac said goodbye to their former neighbors and a few new ones, packed up their brooms and shovels, and returned to their "temporary" homes in Sanski Most and other Bosnian Government cities.

Doug Hostetter, FOR's interfaith director, led the FOR's Interfaith Work Camp in Bosnia this August. There will be further reports from the Work Camp in the next issue of Fellowship.