

Producer's notes

Cambis is both insider and outsider in this story and the film unfolds like a 6 month visual diary as he meets the city's people, learns of the personal impacts of the war and comes to terms with his own cultural history. *Exile in Sarajevo* is the impact of the war on the civilian population in Sarajevo, particularly its children (see [clip one](#)). The children's stories are the most poignant – that of Amira, a witness to rape and torture who has documented her experience and Nirvana, a twelve-year-old killed by a shell. . The reality experienced by individual Sarajevans is juxtaposed with the 'official' accounts of how the war unfolded to suggest that the international community was unable if not unwilling to come to their aid. The film incorporates news footage, press conferences and quotes from United Nations representatives to provide some of the broader political context. offers an alternative portrayal of the Bosnian War and the Siege of Sarajevo to the mainstream news coverage by focusing Overall the film, became, is a very personal and poetic homage to the city, as well as a bitter attack on those who were responsible for its destruction.

Exile in Sarajevo ended-up winning an international Emmy - not bad for a film that at one stage looked like finishing in a heap on the floor.

Exile in Sarajevo was a film that came from nowhere, in the sense that I wasn't involved in coming up with the idea. I was invited to participate in a match-making process by Sonja Armstrong who was a senior project officer at the Australian Film Commission. The AFC decided to fully fund 3 feature documentaries, and one of them was EXILE. Why this one was selected was a bit dubious I later decided, given that Sonja and Bosnian-Australian and Tahir Cambis had similar ethnicity. The idea was that Sonja would suggest several producers and Tahir to have a meeting with each one. It was up to Tahir in the end who he chose. I felt like a gun for hire, but I was a bit intrigues as well, plus I needed the money. I met Tahir at Bar Italia. He was sitting at a back table. He joked with me that he always had a habit of sitting with the wall behind him, for fear of risking his life, a habit he got into on his last trip to Sarajevo two years earlier. Tahir had a limp caused by a bullet wound he incurred on that trip which landed in hospital for several months. He narrowly escaped death, he told me – as if to prove to me that he was totally fearless.

I soon found out I was chosen to be the producer. I'm not sure I was ready for it. Tahir had never made a film, though he had made rock clips, and he had directed theatre. I realised I had to hold his hand, and surround him with an experienced crew. This involved finding a cinematographer who was willing to risk their life in a war zone. We met a lot of people, but they all turned down. One person we didn't meet initially was Roman Baska, but a quick experience working in longform, having been working mainly in commercials. I wasn't sure, but Roman demanded a meeting. I still recall him come down the side of the house – all eager and excited. The next step them was to plan the actual trip, organise the gear, the visas, the insurance.

It wasn't long before the production contingency was spent. Try getting insurance for a trip into a warzone. Roman demanded that we take out life insurance. He was thinking of his own family, in case he never came back. I had to deal with an insurance broker in London. Needless to say the premium was double what I'd budgeted for.

I decided we should buy one high quality camera from the budget, and also get a basic cheap second one just in case anything happened to the other one. That decision ended up being crucial

The crew left Australia on ... 1995 with ruck sacks, flak jackets, camping stoves, freeze dried food – all prepared to camp in a partly damaged house with no electricity. To get in to the city, the only way was at night, and you ran the gauntlet of Bosnian Serb forces. I went with them, but not all the way. Only as far as Zagreb. I still remember the old cathedral. It had been bombed just 6 days before we arrived.

There was little time to research characters, and Tahir had to do it on the run. Fortunately we had a young assistant Alma, who was the sound recordist/fixer. Our only communication was through fax, and he sent only 3 – all hand-written. Three months in Sarajevo turned into four

I eventually ran out of money to pay Roman so the director himself had to take over the filming. Tahir was fearless. Sold his flak jacket for spending money.

Cambis initially had a camera operator to film events, but after the 15 weeks of budgeted shooting came to an end, the camera operator returned to Australia. Cambis and Sahbaz decided to continue recording the conflict to its bitter end equipped with a Hi8 camera. He'd never used a camera before. Six months turned into eight. I didn't know if he was still alive. Then one day he rang from the airport - he'd arrived with Alma whom he's started a relationship with, but minus his flak jacket which he had traded for food and rent.

Tahir had a strong vision and I supplied him with a very experienced editor. Both Cambis and Sahbaz narrate their reflections in voice-over throughout the film.

Tom Zubrycki