

# BOSNIAN GENOCIDE DENIAL AND TRIUMPHALISM: ORIGINS, IMPACT AND PREVENTION



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*Edited by*  
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# Bosnian Genocide Denial and Triumphalism: Origins, Impact and Prevention

Editors:

Sead Turčalo – Hikmet Karčić

Sarajevo, 2021.



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# Preface

THE YEAR 2020 marked the 25th anniversary of the genocide against Bosniak in the UN ‘Safe Area’ of Srebrenica by Bosnian Serb Army and police forces in July 1995. After a quarter of a century, denial of the Srebrenica genocide not only persists but is bolder and more pervasive than ever before.

In the last two years alone, the Bosnian Serb establishment has founded a revisionist commission supposedly tasked with uncovering the “truth” about what happened in Srebrenica. Peter Handke, a lackey of Milošević and avowed genocide denier, was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in Stockholm. Serbian nationalists in Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina continue to instrumentalize denial and minimization of the Srebrenica genocide in pursuit of their regional political agendas. Additionally, the Bosnian genocide continues to be a source of inspiration for far-right extremists across the globe, as evidenced by the brutal terrorist attacks in Oslo, Norway and in Christchurch, New Zealand.

Bearing in mind these alarming circumstances, the Srebrenica Potočari Memorial Center, the Faculty of Political Science at the University of Sarajevo and the

Institute for Islamic Tradition of Bosniaks attempted to take a stand against genocide denial and historical revisionism by organizing a virtual conference titled *Denial and Triumphalism: Origins, Impact and Prevention*. This hybrid conference, interdisciplinary conference with a focus on memory, denial, prevention, and accountability, was held at the Faculty of Political Science in Sarajevo on July 10, 2020.

This publication consists of a selected number of papers presented at this conference with the aim to perpetuate this attempt at combating denial and triumphalism in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

*The Editors*

# Opening Statement by Ambassador Samantha Power\*

LET ME BEGIN by thanking Emir Suljagić – a survivor of Srebrenica at 20 years-old who lost his uncle, grandfather, and almost every one of his classmates in the massacre. Let me also thank the Srebrenica Memorial Center, the University of Sarajevo, and the Institute for Islamic Tradition of Bosniaks for organizing this essential event. I feel privileged to have been invited to participate.

We are gathering this year to mark the twenty-fifth anniversary of the largest massacre in Europe since the Second World War. If not for the COVID pandemic, heads of state, ministers, and private citizens would have flown from all over the world to mark this grim milestone and to remember the dead.

I was a reporter in Sarajevo when Bosnian Serb forces murdered more than 8,000 Bosniak men and boys in Srebrenica. I covered the fall of the so-called

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\* American journalist, human rights scholar, and government official who served on the National Security Council (2008–13) and as the U.S. ambassador to the United Nations (2013–17) in the administration of Pres. Barack Obama. She later served as administrator of USAID (2021– ) under Pres. Joe Biden.

“safe area” for the *Washington Post*. More than any single event in my life, the massacre hardened my determination to one day be involved in helping bring the perpetrators of such crimes to justice.

In 2005, on the ten-year anniversary of the Srebrenica massacre, I joined my friend the journalist David Rohde on a walk with survivors and the grown children of victims through the woods where men had been hunted like animals. Even a decade removed from the killings, we still encountered scraps of clothing, discarded shoes and IDs, and even scattered bone fragments. David also drove me to Nova Kasaba where the month after the Srebrenica genocide he had discovered a leg protruding from a mass grave site. He also took me to the football stadium in Bratunac where he had found feces, blood and bullet-marks.

I returned once again to Srebrenica in 2010, this time as a U.S. government official, the personal emissary for President Barack Obama who condemned “the horror of Srebrenica” as “a stain on our collective conscience” and a “stark reminder of the need for the world to respond resolutely in the face of evil.” On that trip, I met a mother who had lost her husband and 5 children – that year, she was burying the 4th of her five sons. She told me, “My son I am burying today was only seventeen. He was just a young boy. I didn’t have time to love him enough. I didn’t give him enough hugs. He wouldn’t have known what he meant to me.” As we parted, I promised her that the US would never give up on bringing to justice those who had orchestrated the murder of her loved ones.

A year later, I was awakened early in the morning by a call from a close colleague in the US government: “We got Mladić,” he said breathlessly. Backed by British and

American intelligence agencies, officers from the Serbian Interior Ministry had found and arrested Mladić in his cousin's farmhouse. The Serbian government had dedicated itself to finding Mladić – and finally, the world's most notorious war criminal was going to the Hague, an institution he had openly mocked.

While I served as US Ambassador to the UN, I participated in the 2015 commemoration of Srebrenica from New York. I had the ghastly experience of sitting in the Security Council Chamber after Russian President Vladimir Putin instructed his UN ambassador to veto a commemorative resolution. The veto was cast for one reason – and one reason only – and that was because the text included a dark and well-established truth – the massacres committed in Srebrenica were no ordinary crimes; they constituted genocide. After Russia issued its veto, I relayed to my fellow Ambassadors on the Council the experience I'd had as a twenty-four-year-old reporter in Sarajevo when a colleague had first told me about reports of mass executions. Not wanting to believe what I was hearing in July 1995, my reaction had simply been “No” – no, it couldn't be. And yet earlier that day in 2015, when I had learned that Russia was planning to veto the 2015 Srebrenica resolution, I had a version of the same reaction: “No. No.”

If the mothers of the boys executed in Srebrenica had been able to travel to the UN, I told the Security Council, they would ask how anybody could reject the truth that defines their every waking moment.

What I have just described of my own interface with Srebrenica tracks in broad strokes what we know of the last quarter century. First, at the time of the murders, outsiders were often incredulous, reluctant to believe. Then, eventually, an international and local reckoning

occurred. And sadly, in the more recent phase, we have witnessed a decent into denial – a development occurring with greater frequency, as recently documented by the Srebrenica Memorial Center.

Denial is now spreading and getting worse for many reasons. For starters, the powerful Russian Federation has thrown its considerable weight behind genocide denial. Moscow has done so not because of some Russian Orthodox kinship with people of the Serbian Orthodox faith. No, it has done so because of the zero-sum mindset that characterizes virtually all of Russia's moves in the international sphere in recent years – Serbia drawing closer to Europe would be bad for Russia, Putin seems to have concluded. Therefore, Russia will do all it can to lure Serbia away – organizing joint military exercises, providing arms and investment, and masquerading as Serbia's protector at the United Nations.

Russia has another reason for helping fund and perpetrate genocide denial. It has a broader strategic ambition to see nihilism spread, to see the status of truth and facts and evidence weakened everywhere. If facts and evidence go out of fashion, and everything – even the forensically documented slaughter of some 8,000 human beings – if everything is simply another person's opinion or ideology, then I guess the perverse logic holds, the facts of Russia's stagnant economy, the facts of Putin's slumping popularity, the facts of Russia's mishandling of the Coronavirus, then maybe those facts can be challenged as just somebody else's opinion as well.

Unfortunately, genocide denial is not just a problem in Russia, Serbia, and Republika Srpska. It is being aided by those actors who should know far better. For the Nobel Committee to reward someone who says he “would not judge” what happened in Srebrenica, someone who

eulogized Slobodan Milošević. For them to award someone of that nature at the very time that facts and evidence *in general* are under siege around the world – that will be a lasting stain on the credibility of the Nobel Prize.

But please know one thing: genocide denial is not going to work. Mladić was recorded on film carting the men and boys away on buses while assuring them, “No one will harm you.” Thanks to the relentlessness of Srebrenica survivors and the relatives of the deceased, the bodies of those killed have been recovered and given the dignified burial that those executed were told they would never get. Thanks to scientific advances and the accumulation of huge amounts of DNA evidence, as of June 2020, 94 mass-grave exhumations and 6,960 DNA identifications of the dead had occurred. Indeed, this year, on July 11<sup>th</sup>, eight Srebrenica victims identified over the past year will be buried at the Srebrenica Memorial Center. The youngest victim, Salko Ibišević, was 23 years old at the time of the genocide. The oldest, Hasan (Alija) Pezić, was 70 years old. We know the names of each of those who will be buried this year: Sead (Huso) Hasanović (1971), Alija (Bekto) Suljić (1969), Hasib (Saban) Hasanović (1970), Zuhdija (Suljo) Avdagić (1947), Bajro (Ramo) Salihović (1943), and Ibrahim (Hamid) Zukanović (1941).

In addition, genocide denial will not work because the International Court of Justice established more than a decade ago that Bosnian Serb soldiers perpetrated genocide. The International Criminal Tribunal for Yugoslavia and courts in the Balkans have sentenced 47 people to more than 700 years in prison, plus four life sentences, for the crimes committed in Srebrenica.

This year, in response to the Dutch Supreme Court’s ruling in 2019 that the Netherlands was partly

responsible for the deaths of 350 men whom Dutch peacekeepers turned over to Mladić and his henchmen, the Dutch government began efforts to prepare compensation settlements for their family members. Although Handke still has his Nobel prize – as well as a statue being built for him in Banja Luka in Republic Srpska – the Nobel Committee faced boycotts of their ceremony from a number of countries and even a member of the awarding committee. It has been met with protesters in Stockholm and an international social media campaign calling attention to the dangers of genocide denialism. This speaks to the widespread recognition all around the world of the *specifics* of what occurred in Srebrenica a quarter century ago. All over the European Union, July 11 has been recognized as a day to commemorate the genocide, a decision made with overwhelming support in the European Parliament. In 2018, the Parliament even passed a resolution criticizing “the reiterated denial of genocide in Srebrenica by some Serbian officials.” Here in the United States, the House of Representatives has twice adopted resolutions calling attention to the Srebrenica genocide.

When I was in government, I used to tell my team, that we would prevail if we “cared more and worked harder.” I believe that the record of what happened in Srebrenica will never be disputed in credible circles because you who have organized this event – and the families of those devastated by the crimes of July 1995 – will never, ever allow it. Indeed, because you care more and you work harder, I believe that one day Srebrenica genocide deniers will have the same status, or lack of status, as Holocaust deniers.

The facts – and you who have painstakingly documented and called attention to those facts – will prevail.

# The Second War: Journalism and the Protection of the Memory of Genocide From the Forces of Denial

PETER MAASS\*

HELLO SREBRENICA, HELLO SARAJEVO, hello everyone who's watching or listening.

My name is Peter Maass. I reported on the Bosnia war for *The Washington Post* in 1992 and 1993, and then I wrote a book about it called "Love Thy Neighbor."

I'm a journalist, and that means I don't have the qualifications to deliver an academic paper. What I do is tell stories, true stories, so what I'd like to do today is tell a two-part story about the role of journalism in chronicling and remembering genocide.

I'd like to start by quoting a line from Viet Thanh Nguyen's great Vietnam book "Nothing Ever Dies." The book is about the memory of war, and in it he wrote that "all wars are fought twice: the first time on the battlefield, the second time in memory."

Journalists tend to only be interested in that first war, the one that gets all the attention, when people are fighting and dying and the world is interested or pretends to be.

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\* Senior editor and writer at the *Intercept*. Author of *Love Thy Neighbor: A Story of War* (Vintage, 1997)

I think journalists need to take as much interest in the second war, the one for memory, and that is what I'll address at the end of this story I'm telling.

When I was 32 years old, which now feels like another lifetime, I went to Bosnia to cover the war.

I stayed in Sarajevo during its first winter of siege, and I travelled all around the country and filed stories almost every day. I visited Omarska and Trnopolje before they were shut down, I stopped by the famous Ferhadjia mosque in Banja Luka that was dynamited a few months later.

I got arrested trying to visit a secret prison camp at Batković. I was in Prozor on the day HVO forces took over, I wrote about refugees streaming into Travnik after Jajce fell, and I was turned back from Zepa at a Serb roadblock. I also interviewed Slobodan Milošević and Radovan Karadžić.

I say this to make the point that I did the same work that a generation of war reporters was also doing in Bosnia. Journalists like to say that they write the first draft of history, and that's what we were doing.

It was not without result. Though the eventual military intervention by the U.S. and its NATO allies was too late and too weak, and though the Dayton Peace Accord was in many ways a travesty, the crimes that were committed in Bosnia were all but codified by the time the war ended. The war crimes trials at the ICTY confirmed it.

After covering the war, I wrote a book about it, and once the book came out in 1996, I thought my work was done. The war was over, the truth of genocide was known, even though it obviously yet wasn't accepted by most Serbs.

Like other war reporters, I drifted away to other wars and other concerns, to Somalia, to Sudan, to

Afghanistan and then to Iraq. I returned to Bosnia just once, in 1999 when my book was published there, and I returned to Serbia just once, to write about the overthrow of Milošević.

Again, I thought my work was done. I was always aware of the enduring denialism among many Serbs, but I didn't pay attention to the smattering of people outside the former Yugoslavia who doubted the genocide.

They were on the fringe, they had no influence, they were defeated, they would die off soon.

I was wrong about that, obviously, and the wake-up call came last October when the Nobel Prize for Literature was awarded to Peter Handke, who for decades had written these terrible books that doubted and denied the genocide in Bosnia. In October, I began working on what turned out to be a series of stories about Handke's denialism and the Swedish Academy's endorsement of it.

As we all know, the Nobel Prize organization was not moved – Handke picked up his Nobel medal from the Swedish King in early December.

Without intending to, I was now covering the “second war” that Nguyen referenced – the one for memory. I did not think it would need to be fought in the English-speaking world, but here we are.

One of the discoveries I made is that much of the original reporting on the Bosnia war is unavailable to the general public. For example, the landmark stories that Roy Gutman wrote for *Newsday* about the Serb-run death camps in the summer of 1992 – they are not available on the internet. The newspaper that published those stories, *Newsday*, is no longer in existence. Its archives do not remain on the internet. There is a

truncated version of the story that was published by the Los Angeles Times, but it is not the full length of the original, the historic original.

I saw Roy in Stockholm in December and I asked him about this, and he confirmed what I had discovered. He mentioned that he of course has a hard copy of the stories but he has not gotten around to digitizing them and seeding them on the web.

There are many other examples. When Handke was awarded his Nobel, dozens of war reporters tweeted against it, and some of them linked to stories they had written about the war. But many could not do that – their stories were either not on the web or were behind paywalls.

For instance, Samantha Power, who was a freelancer during the war, tweeted about a story she wrote about Srebrenica in 1995 for the Boston Globe – but she had to tweet a photo of it. The story does not exist, as far as I can tell, in a publicly available digital form.

When we ask ourselves the question of how the denialism of genocide in Bosnia can exist and persist, one of the answers, just one of the answers (there are a lot), is that the original journalism about it is no longer available to the general public. This is a tremendous gift to the denialists. The first draft of history, imperfect as it is but it's still a first draft, is available only in fragments to the general public.

Of course researchers who have the time and the resources can probably find what they need through microfilm and proprietary data bases. But that demonstrates the problem – much of the journalistic evidence that we need is almost quite literally locked away from public view.

To remedy this, in the past few months, I've talked with a variety of colleagues, particularly Janine di Giovanni, who also reported on the war, and what I'm hoping to do with others is to assemble a digital archive of news stories about the Bosnia war.

The first step would be to assemble the English language stories, and then move on to other languages.

As I've begun to explore this idea, I've realized how difficult it might be to achieve, but I want to give it a shot. Evidence doesn't cure denialism, we all know that all too well unfortunately, but it can be part of the cure.

So I'd like to take advantage of this event to invite anyone with suggestions, or who might like to help in any way, to contact me. I can be reached through my own personal website, or through the news organization I now work for, The Intercept. Just go to these places on the web and you'll find contact information for me.

In a way that I have to admit is somewhat perverse, perhaps Peter Handke and the Nobel Prize organization, amid all the tremendous harm that they have caused, have done us a small favor. They have made former war reporters like myself aware that the first war is over but the second war is really only beginning. Though some of my colleagues are no longer with us, most of them are, and I hope we can come together again to resume what I now realize is our unfinished work.

Thank you very much for listening to this story. We have a lot of work to do.

# Left-Wing Denial of the Bosnian Genocide

MARKO ATTILA HOARE\*

THE GENOCIDE IN BOSNIA, and in Srebrenica in particular, produced a very strong denialist current among elements of the political left. It is, of course, not the case that it was just members of the left whose response to the genocide was problematic; the Conservative government in Britain – a right-wing government – actively collaborated in it, and there were members of the far-right who supported the Serb extremists. It's also not true that everyone on the left supported the genocide or apologised for it; there were many people on the left who also defended Bosnia and other victims of the genocide and the Serb-extremist aggression. Nevertheless, genocide denial in a radical left-wing form was a particularly strong phenomenon. So there was a correlation between radical left-wing views and genocide denialism. Many of the biggest names in the radical left, in Britain, the US and elsewhere,

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supported the Serb perpetrators of genocide and crimes against humanity, or at least apologised for them or tried to minimise their culpability, presenting them as victims of some sort of hostile Western imperialist conspiracy or aggression. Such figures and publications included Noam Chomsky, John Pilger, the former Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn, Tony Benn, Diane Abbott, *The Nation* magazine in the US, the Socialist Workers Party and *Living Marxism* in the UK. Also, many or most of the most prominent denialist tracts seeking to defend the regime of Slobodan Milošević and deny its crimes, and the crimes of Karadžić, Mladić and other Serb-extremist perpetrators were written from a radical left-wing perspective, by authors such as Diana Johnstone, David Gibbs, Kate Hudson, Ed Herman, David Peterson, Michael Parenti and others. This article seeks to explain why radical left-wing activists or thinkers wanted to support, apologise for, deny or downplay genocide in the former Yugoslavia.

One reason was a sort of tribalist left-wing identification with the regime of Slobodan Milošević, on the grounds that it was socialist. Milošević called himself socialist; his party was the continuation of the League of Communists of Serbia. At a time when the Communist regimes had been tumbling across the whole of Eastern Europe, Milošević seemed to be one of the last upholders of that legacy. Consequently, leftists who believed in Communist dictatorship, as the vehicle for historical progress from a left-wing perspective, naturally then tended to identify with the Milošević regime. A second factor was ‘anti-imperialism’; an assumption that the Western powers – the so-called imperialist powers – were naturally victimising socialist Serbia and seeking to punish it for the sake of their

own interests. There was an inability to accept that the socialist Yugoslav federation could have broken up for any reason other than Western-imperialist meddling. These were thinkers and activists who were really not interested in trying to understand the break-up of Yugoslavia, but were ready to blame the West – so-called Western imperialism – for the destruction of Yugoslavia. It was easier to blame the West than to come to terms with the failure of this state-socialist system that they had been championing.

A third factor was hostility to liberal values; since liberals were in principle opposed to genocide and crimes against humanity, and supported outside military intervention to stop such crimes, it was unsurprising that their radical critics to the left wanted to defend the perpetrators and oppose military intervention. One of the ironies of this, is that these left-wing deniers and apologists for the Milošević regime, found common ground with conservative-realist politicians and thinkers. For example, while the British Conservative government was collaborating in the genocide, people on the radical left were effectively supporting the British-government position on grounds of ‘anti-imperialism’; on the grounds that there should not be any intervention against Serb forces. This was linked to suspicion of the Western media; the idea that if the media was reporting Serb atrocities, this had to be linked to some sort of ‘imperialist conspiracy’ to ‘demonise the Serbs’, as they put it. The war in the former Yugoslavia occurred directly after the US-led war with Saddam Hussein’s Iraq over Kuwait, when there had been media reports of Iraqi atrocities that were basically accurate, but in which the media had got some details wrong (e.g. the accusations of Iraqi

troops ‘pulling babies from incubators’ in a Kuwaiti hospital) that were eagerly seized upon by anti-war leftists as evidence of media manipulation. So in the eyes of the radical left, media reports of Serb atrocities were just another excuse for a war against Serbia as there had been a war against Iraq.

For all these reasons, there was an instinctive identification with Milošević’s Socialist regime in Serbia, and by extension with Karadžić’s forces, on the part of much of the radical left. This led such leftists to atrocity denialism; attempts to claim such atrocities had been fabricated by the Western imperialist media, and that the real victims were not the people being massacred in Bosnia by Serb-extremist perpetrators, but the perpetrators themselves, supposed victims of negative Western media coverage. Another irony was that denialist leftists would challenge reports by top Western reporters such as Ed Vulliamy, Ian Williams, Penny Marshall, Maggie O’Kane, Christiane Amanpour, David Rohde and others, accusing them of being stooges of imperialism in effect, while believing without question any and every accusation against Bosniaks, or Croats on the part of UN officials. The fact that many, if not most UN officials were actively hostile to the Bosnian government meant that left-wing deniers would regularly repeat UN officials’ accusations against the Bosnian government. For example, the accusation that the Bosnian government was shelling its own people to provoke Western military intervention against Serb forces was a lie – what one might call an ‘imperialist’ lie – nevertheless an imperialist lie that left-wing deniers were ready to repeat uncritically.

The irony, of course, was that the West was not hostile to Milošević’s Serbia at the time; during the war

in Bosnia-Herzegovina, the West collaborated with Milošević's Serbia, imposing and maintaining an international arms embargo that benefited the Serb perpetrators and penalised the legitimate Bosnian government. But the arms embargo was not condemned and was barely acknowledged by left-wing deniers, as it ran counter to the myth that they were trying to build, of Serb nationalists as victims of a Western imperialist conspiracy. The left-wing deniers furthermore internalised Serb-nationalist myths and accusations against Bosniaks Croats, Albanians and others; for example, the myth of the historically 'anti-imperialist' Serbs vs the Bosniaks, Croats and Albanians as historic stooges of imperialism was coopted by the left-wing deniers from the Serb extremists. Hence, the Serb-nationalist trope that Bosniaks, Croats and Albanians had been fascist and pro-Nazi during while Serbs had supposedly been anti-fascist; left-wing deniers played up the history of the Ustasha regime and 'Independent State of Croatia' but played down both the history of the Nazi-collaborationist Chetnik movement and Serbia's quisling Nedic government, and the fact of massive Croat, Bosniak and Albanian participation in the Partisan movement alongside Serbs.

The left-wing deniers attempted to deny not just atrocities but the actual fact of genocide. For example, the Srebrenica genocide was denied by most of these left-wing thinkers in question; people like Noam Chomsky would deny that what happened at Srebrenica was genocide. For them, it was a question of keeping the definition of genocide as narrow as possible, to prevent genocide being used as a justification for Western military intervention. What they feared, was that when genocide

was seen as happening, it would provide justification for Western military intervention against Serb forces.

Another factor contributing to the radical-left propensity to denialism was contrarianism: the fact that it was widely viewed as outrageous or provocative to support Milošević and Karadžić motivated some radical leftists to do so. This was the case particularly with the Revolutionary Communist Party and its *Living Marxism* publication, which supported Milošević and Karadžić as part of their consistent policy of adopting contrarian positions vis-a-vis the views of the liberal mainstream. It was the liberal mainstream that they viewed as the enemy, not the Conservative British government.

For all these reasons, the left-wing deniers came together to defend the Serb-extremist perpetrators and smear and denigrate the victims of genocide. One of the paradoxes was that for all the talk of anti-imperialism, what they were really doing was prioritising their own Western domestic concerns; they prioritised their own Western left-wing needs – to oppose Western armed forces bombing anyone and promote a leftwing anti-war, anti-imperialist narrative – over the needs of people on the ground in the former Yugoslavia, about whom they did not care. Whether Bosniaks, Croats or Albanians were being massacred did not interest them; the rights or wrongs of the conflict itself did not ultimately interest them; all that mattered was that opposition to Western imperialism and militarism should take priority.

This current of thought has proven very resilient; the tendency to defend perpetrators has continued. Hence there is continued identification with tyrannical left-wing dictators such as Fidel Castro, a Communist

dictator who had supported Milošević very publicly during the latter's genocidal assault on the Albanian people of Kosovo in 1999; identification with the Maduro regime in Venezuela and the Assad regime in Syria – including attempts to portray Assad as some sort of victim of Western conspiracy and imperialism. There is a continued tendency to identify left-wing values with 'progressive' despots and with 'anti-imperialism' or opposition to Western military intervention. So when mainstream elements in the West criticise or target such despots, radical-leftists march to their defence. The left-wing denialism that flourished in response to the genocide in Bosnia has continued its tradition and become very prevalent since then; it is by no means limited to the former Yugoslavia.

# To Deny the Facts of the Horrors of Srebrenica Is Contemptible and Dangerous: Concrete Recommendations to Counter Such Denial

SAMUEL TOTTEN\*

## **Introduction**

To deny the fact of torture, a crime against humanity, and/or genocide is contemptible. To engage in such denial speaks to the ugliness, callousness, viciousness, and smallness that certain human beings are capable of; in a word, it is: disgraceful.

But denial of torture, crimes against humanity and/or genocide is also treacherous, irresponsible, and, in certain cases, venal. In other words, the deniers are denying for a specific reason: to attempt to cover up the facts; to cover for this or that perpetrator and/or group of perpetrators; to shirk responsibility for the criminal actions; and/or to rewrite history by inserting falsities and lies, and even calumny. Such attempts at denial are not only sickening but dangerous.

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\* Long-time scholar of genocide studies and retired professor (University of Arkansas, Fayetteville).

Denial of genocide in the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries has been rife. Among some of the many genocides that have been denied include the following: the Ottoman Turk genocide of the Armenians, the Soviet manmade famine of Ukraine, the Nazi genocide of the Jews, the 1994 genocide of the Tutsis and moderate Hutus in Rwanda, and the genocide of the Black Africans of Darfur by the Government of Sudan. *And, disturbingly, the July 1995 genocide of some 8,000 Muslims boys and men by the Serbs.*

To effectuate their repugnant efforts at denial, deniers pull out all of the stops, just as those battling the deniers must do. Both in the past and today among the means deniers have used are: distorting the facts, issuing repeated lies, glorifying the reputations of perpetrators while scorning and disparaging victims, and assiduously attempting to rewrite history – falsifying the record, whitewashing it, using verbiage that raises questions in people’ minds about the facts of the case, minimizing the horrors, obfuscating what really happened by whom against whom and why, and claiming that the real victims are those who are being accused of genocide.

In doing so, the deniers make use of any and all avenues that they believe will further their compulsive and pathological denials cum lies, including but not limited to the following: school curricula, textbooks, classroom instruction, speeches, false testimony at court trials, the Internet, radio, television, word of mouth, films, newspapers, magazines, the issuance of false reports, pamphlets, lectures, books by deniers, and articles in denier-published newspapers, magazines, and so-called refereed journals. In other words, there is nothing too low for such purveyors of such outrageousness.

The record of the criminal acts and crimes perpetrated at Srebrenica is extensive, substantive, eclectic and irrefutable, despite the attempts by fools (including such bastards as that Peter Handke) and those with odious and ulterior motives. Read, for example, David Rohde's magnificent book, *Endgame: The Betrayal and Fall of Srebrenica*; Jan Willem Hoing and Norbert Both's chilling *Srebrenica: Record of a War Crime*; and Selma Leydesdorff's moving book, *Surviving the Bosnian Genocide: The Women of Srebrenica Speak*. Comb the countless articles published in *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, and other major newspapers across the globe; Study the reports issued by the UN Security Council; Examine the reports issued by major international human rights organizations, such as Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International; Scour the testimony of eyewitnesses, along with the words of the prosecutors and judges, in the records of the trials held at the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia whose focus was the crimes perpetrated at Srebrenica; and, View such powerful and informative films as "Srebrenica: A Cry from the Grave," "Resolution 819," and "Safe Haven: The United Nations and the Betrayal of Srebrenica." *And by all means do not overlook the first-person accounts of survivors*, among others – see, for example, "Eyewitness Testimony: Bosnia and Herzegovina" on the United States Holocaust Memorial Museums website.

In light of space constraints, I shall solely focus on recommendations I think are worthy of serious consideration in the ongoing battle against the denial of the Srebrenica genocide. In delineating such recommendations, I have chosen to pursue an approach that

might be referred to as “pulling out all the stops,” and I have done so in order to counter how deniers “pull out all the stops” in carrying out their repellent ends.

### **Recommendations**

- Develop the most historically accurate and powerful curricula on the Srebrenica genocide for use in schools all over the globe. It is imperative that it includes powerful and highly informative first-person accounts. The curricula should be developed by a highly respected historian and top-notch curriculum specialists. *Rationale:* This would contribute to helping teachers all over the globe to teach the hard facts and truth about the Srebrenica genocide, thus helping to form a bulwark against denial efforts.
- Develop individual lessons and units that stand alone, thus providing key materials for teachers who have little time to dedicate to the Srebrenica genocide and for which a full curriculum would be of little to no use. *Rationale:* This would help to assure that those teachers who might be keen to teach about the Srebrenica genocide but have little to no time to develop their own lessons and/or have little time to teach about the genocide would have access to one or two- or three-days’ worth of lessons at their fingertips. Without access to such lessons hurried teachers may simply choose not to teach about the Srebrenica genocide.
- Conduct, transcribe, annotate, and publish as many first-person accounts by survivors of the Srebrenica genocide as possible, and make the

accounts readily available to journalists, educators, students and others. *Rationale*: First-person testimony can reach students and the average person in ways that neither detailed essays nor scholarly articles are capable of doing. Reading powerful and informative first-person testimonies often leave readers with a desire to learn more about an event and/or a desire to support such efforts as fighting deniers of the genocide.

- Make the aforementioned first-person testimony available on-line as well. It could be placed on the Internet under the auspices of a major university and/or organization whose primary focus is the Srebrenica genocide. *Rationale*: The more ways individuals can access such testimony the more likely it is to be located, read and discussed, and/or used in the classroom.
- Undertake a campaign to prod and cajole the following international organizations, *which have already addressed the denial of one genocide or another*, to issue a major statement, report or measures vis-à-vis the denial of the genocide at Srebrenica: The United Nations Assembly, the European Union, UNESCO, Psychology International, Special Adviser of the UN Secretary General on the Prevention of Genocide, the Council of Europe Convention on Cybercrime, European Court of Human Rights, and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, The Association for Genocide Scholars (issued a statement regarding the denial of the Armenian genocide), and the Genocide Education Project (issued a statement regarding the denial of the Armenian genocide). *Rationale*: International

organizations attract widespread attention, and their work provides an imprimatur of sorts for those who might wish to follow suit.

- Undertake a campaign to prod and cajole such refereed journals as *Genocide Studies and Prevention: An International Journal*, *Genocide Studies International*, *the Journal of Genocide Research* to commit to producing a special issue on the issue of the denial of the Srebrenica genocide. They all have likely already included articles on the denial of the Holocaust and/or the Armenian genocide, and there is no reason why they shouldn't commit to helping combat the denial of the Srebrenica genocide. A person to contact about this matter in relation to the first two journals is Henry Theriault, the current president of the International Association of Genocide Scholars, as he once served as a co-editor of GSP and now co-edits GSI. Now is the time – before his period of service expires – to cajole him to make such a commitment and to issue it in writing. *Rationale:* Many of those interested in the issue of genocide (be they scholars, instructors, students, etc.) are not likely to be conversant with the denial of Srebrenica genocide and those who are behind it, and the inclusion of this matter in such journals would be a service to the field of genocide studies and education about genocide.
- Establish a museum, even if small and only comprised of two or three rooms. *Rationale:* Museums around the world that focus on specific genocides (e.g., from the U.S. to Canada, from Rwanda to Israel, from Germany to Poland, and from Bangladesh to Cambodia) attract massive

numbers of visitors, all of which helps to educate visitors about genocide denial. Yad Vashem in Jerusalem, Israel, began as a very small museum with an incredibly powerful and thought-provoking exhibit. The point is, small is fine as long as it is outstanding.

- Urge, prod, and cajole the International Association of Genocide Scholars to commit to including a panel session (or better yet, a keynote speaker and a panel discussion) around the denial of the Srebrenica genocide at each of their conferences held over the next decade or two. *Rationale:* This is just one more way to inform and educate those who already have an interest in genocide, but may not be conversant with the efforts of deniers of the Srebrenica genocide.
- The U.S. military talks about how wars are fought on both physical terrain (i.e., deserts, city streets, mountains, jungles) and human terrain (e.g., specific clans in the area, loyalties among local groups, animosities among local groups, cultural issues at work in the region, etc.). In the field, the U.S. military use satellites to delineate in great detail the physical terrain while the human terrain is researched and duly noted on those places on the map where such information is germane. It is understood that attention to one “terrain” but not the other is a major detriment to the war effort, and will likely result in false starts and lost battles, if not the loss of the war.

What I suggest is that the leaders of the battle against the denial of the Srebrenica genocide conduct its own examination of both the physical terrain and human terrain of the denial of such denial and

subsequently collate and delineate such information on a map. Information collected and delineated about the human terrain should be two-fold. First, it should include the location of the deniers, the deniers' affiliation, the specific actions of the deniers, and the specific target(s) of the deniers. Second, information should also be collected that includes, for example, the following: those – *residing and/or working in the same region of the deniers* – who are known to look askance at or have already spoken out against the deniers' efforts; those who have acknowledged the Srebrenica genocide (in writing and/or some other form, be they scholars, journalists, educators or others); those who have taught their students the truth about the Srebrenica genocide; philanthropists who might contribute to fighting the deniers, etc. *Rationale*: This is a key way to attract people who might automatically but wrongly be considered prone to supporting genocide deniers solely due to where they reside and/or work. Such individuals, in fact, may look askance at the efforts of the deniers.

Furthermore, by attracting individuals who are the same nationality of and/or live among those who perpetrated the genocide adds a strong and unique voice to the battle against deniers. If this sounds like an untenable approach to some then I strongly encourage them to familiarize themselves with the story of Professor Taner Akçam, *a Turkish-German historian and sociologist who is one of the first Turkish academics to acknowledge and openly discuss the Armenian Genocide, and is recognized as a "leading international authority" on the subject.*

- Develop a major book on denial of the Srebrenica genocide. When I say "major" I mean that it is imperative to include the most highly

recognized, respected, and informed voices in the book, from survivors to other eyewitnesses to, and from local and international journalists (i.e., David Rohdes and/or Christiane Amanpour) to top local and international scholars, and from forensic scientists operating in the region to those involved in the burying the remains of recently discovered victims. Concomitantly, what I mean by major is that the book be published by a renowned publisher (Yale University Press, Harvard University Press, University of California Press, Oxford University Press, Cambridge University Press, etc.) vs. second and third tier publishers. *Rationale*: This should be obvious.

### **Conclusion**

Unfortunately, the battle against the deniers of the Srebrenica genocide is one that will have to be fought for years on end. Deniers of genocide can be indefatigable, and they frequently attract followers who are either gullible, ignorant, and/or have ulterior motives for dedicating their miserable lives to spreading lies. Because of that, those who battle deniers must be ready, willing and able to out-think, out plan, out maneuver and out battle the purveyors of such disgusting lies. It should not have to be that way, but it is. And since it is, it is a battle worth fighting and winning.

# Life After Death: A View From Serbia

NENAD DIMITRIJEVIĆ\*

IN JULY 1995, near the Bosnian town of Srebrenica, the Serbian army executed more than 7000 human beings. Some 440 among those killed were underage boys. Some were children, some were elderly persons. The youngest victim was Fatima Muhić, the baby-girl born on July 13, 1995, two days old. The oldest victim was Šaha Izmirlić – she was born in 1901.

I visited Potočari Memorial Center in the spring of 2015. From that personal experience I remember mostly emotions: sadness, shame, and hopelessness. Some Serbs, my co-nationals, thought and acted on the assumption that I would be better off if those children, women, and men whom I had never met would not live anymore. And so they were killed.

What can we say about the victims, we who did not know them? Not much. We do not know about their lives, dreams, or everyday worries. Neither do we know how it is to face the imminent death. We do not know what those Bosniak boys in 1995 thought, how

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they felt, or what they wished, when facing the guns. We can assume that they were immensely scared. Did they hope that somehow, by some miracle, they could still be saved? We do not know. We only know that they were human beings, and we ought to assume that each person killed was as valuable as any of us living today.

Those who survived them, family members or friends, are also victims. We can learn a bit more about them. We may find it unpleasant to talk to them, look at them, or think of how they cope. Witnessing their pain may be too much for us who stick to enjoying modest normalcies of our lives.

After such evil, the world stands divided between the dead and the living. The dead shape life. Their absence confronts the living with many questions. Do we have the right to 'life as usual'? Or can it be that the past events have created certain demands, or duties? On a personal level: How should I live after such events? What should I think and how shall I feel about what happened? How should I treat other people, especially those who were targeted by crime?

The answers to these and related questions depend first on the character of the crime and its legacies. Second, the answers depend on who 'we' are. Certain people are identified as victims, direct or indirect. Some other people are identified as wrongdoers, or as persons who are in important ways connected with wrongdoers. In Srebrenica, killers acted as group members, as Serbs; victims were targeted as group members, as non-Serbs. The crime was committed by some Serbs, in the name of all Serbs, and against the non-Serbian population. The crime was justified by reference to the core of the Serbian identity: its alleged shared

values, norms, traditions, and interests; call this the ethical justification of crime, or ethics of evil. Those who joined for the criminal purpose, who formulated and spread criminal intention, and who engaged in criminal acts, justified each of their steps by invoking the identity of the whole group and some alleged good of each of its members. This justification and killing that followed it were accepted by the majority of Serbs, through different forms of the denial of the truth. Without this acceptance, the crime would not be possible at all.

Where are we today? Srebrenica genocide cannot be left isolated in the time that is no more, as a 'past that has passed'. This event remains present in the form of extraordinarily difficult legacies. We can identify groups who in different ways grapple with those legacies, making or failing to make sense of what happened. We are what we make of our recent past. Or, the answer to the question 'who are we?' after the crime depends on whether and how we remember.

This is not a collectivist, but a personal attitude. I ought to remember Srebrenica as a Serbian. Had it not been for a certain reading of my good as a member of the Serbian nation, these people would not have been killed. It is only by coincidence that I am a Serbian, but the crime was systematically committed in my name *because* I am a Serbian. Wrongdoers acted not in their own name only, but in the name of the whole group. My personal attitude to wrongdoing ought to derive from the fact that wrongdoing was a collective practice, where the collective feature connects to my personhood in a non-trivial way. My national name was the very reason for killing the

people of another name. This is why the mere fact of my group identity require that I publicly take the stance on the crime.

What would be an appropriate response of the Serbian community and each its member? There is no room for compromise. Our choice will be either plainly right or plainly wrong. We can choose between stating that Srebrenica does not ethically and morally matter, on the one hand, and acknowledging that it does matter, on the other hand. Put differently, we can identify ourselves with the killers, or we can identify ourselves as decent human beings. If the past is left unaddressed, or if it is thematized through political and cultural strategies of silencing, relativization, and denial, we effectively choose the first option. This comes down to implicitly accepting that our group, with its inherited ethics, remains and will remain shaped by yesterday's moral failure. Or, it comes down to choosing to remain morally blameworthy people in a community supportive of yesterday's killers.

This is what we ought not to choose. We must keep the accounts straight: the past in which the innocent people were killed in our name is our past. We are responsible to remember in the manner appropriate to our relation to crime. First, we are duty-bound to publicly acknowledge victims' suffering. Duty of memory is the debt we owe to victims and their community. We ought to remember and explicate the truth about the crime: killing and other forms of the most brutal harming of the innocent people happened in the recent past; these atrocities were carried out in our name. We should state the following: the crime was wrong; it should not have happened; no argument can be advanced to justify

it; it must not be denied. Second, we all must reflect on recent wrongs, learn from our moral fall, and find in these lessons the guidelines for re-shaping our own society. Third, we should be able to demonstrate – as individuals, society, and polity – that we deserve to be granted one more chance to return to the civilized human community.

With all this duties in mind, let us also reiterate that genocide is the wrong that cannot be righted. The persons whose lives should have been respected as sacrosanct – because they were human beings – are dead; they are dead because of a certain ethical interpretation of our collective identity. There is nothing about this fact that we could ever heal, amend, or help overcoming, nothing to be restored or repaired. We cannot change this moral landscape after the fact. Our lives are morally impaired, and it will remain so. This holds good for morally decent persons as well. If I did not intend, contribute to, or support wrongdoing, my moral burden is neither individual guilt, nor moral blame. Still, I suffer moral loss since the crime ties my identity both with the wrongdoers and the victims: the former killed the latter in my name. This makes me morally tainted. Although I have not done it, it points to who I am.

The burden of injustice done is too heavy to be measured against any other consideration. While it is true that we in Serbia cannot reach democratic normalcy without legally, politically, and economically transforming our society, the justification of the duty of memory is not based on the prospect of a better life for tomorrow. Rather, it is our unconditional debt to the past. We ought to make sense of living in the world in which Srebrenica was possible.

To repeat, this truth will not lift our moral predicament. Keeping it alive, we will not be granted a pass for return to the pre-criminal normalcy. But by acknowledging the bad and explicating our genuine feeling of sorrow for what has happened, we would at least symbolically revoke the Serbian practice of excluding the victims and their community from the moral universe of equal human beings.

# 25 Years After Srebrenica, Genocide Denial Is Pervasive. It Can No Longer Go Unchallenged

EDINA BEĆIREVIĆ\*

IN THE HILLS ABOVE SARAJEVO, in the small town of Pale, there is a university dormitory named after Radovan Karadžić, the Bosnian Serb wartime leader who was sentenced to life in prison for the crime of genocide in 2016.

During the Bosnian war from 1992 to 1995, both the Bosnian Serb military and political leadership were headquartered in Pale, and it was in this relatively obscure town overlooking the Bosnian capital where they planned and ordered a genocide. To honour Karadžić by putting his name on a student dormitory is to revere a man driven to war crimes by ethno-nationalism. It is but one example among many of how genocide denial has become mainstream thanks to Bosnian Serb leaders in the Serb-dominated entity of Republika Srpska, where this denial is deep and pervasive.

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Indeed, to what lengths will Bosnian Serb authorities go to implicate Serb youth in crimes committed before they were even born? Most, if not all, of the students who reside in the dormitory named for Karadžić are surely Serb, as Republika Srpska was largely “cleansed” of non-Serbs during the war. It is still rare for non-Serb students to study at Serb majority universities. Moreover, I find it impossible to imagine that any Bosniak or Croat student could step foot in a dormitory named for a genocidaire like Karadžić, just as I cannot imagine a Jewish student living in a dormitory named for Hitler.

But, for Serb students, this should not be normalised either. As a wave of reckoning washes over the world, as statues come down and buildings are renamed to right the many wrongs in how our histories have been told, in Bosnia and Herzegovina, we must reckon with how the history of what happened just over two decades ago is being told.

The genocide carried out in Bosnia and Herzegovina was a project of neighbouring Serbia, achieved through Bosnian Serb political and military proxies. But genocide requires the psychological preparation of a population through propaganda that dehumanises an “other” and frames them as a “threat” and the “enemy,” to facilitate their recruitment into military actions that result in genocide or their complicity through silent acceptance. In the case of Bosnia and Herzegovina, it was primarily Bosnian Muslims (Bosniaks) who were identified as the “other” and it was ethno-nationalism that functioned as the driving force behind actions by the Serbian state and Bosnian Serb proxies.

Nationalism defines who does and does not have the right to survival. It is for this reason that lawyer

Raphael Lemkin argued that genocide entails much more than killing – it includes elements of social and cultural destruction, too. Echoing this, sociologist Martin Shaw has noted that “defining genocide by killing misses the social aims that lie behind it.” Yet, most governments do define genocide by killing, and by the numbers of people killed in single incidents.

And so, after over three and a half years of “ethnic cleansing” and some 100,000 people killed in Bosnia and Herzegovina, it was only after Serb forces overtook the UN safe area of Srebrenica and killed 8,000 Bosnian Muslim men and boys over several days that the international community was finally compelled to intervene.

This distinction, between the genocidal crimes committed in Srebrenica and those committed earlier in the war, was made by most governments at the time and has been made by many scholars since, raising questions about how these crimes are qualified. During my work as both a journalist and an academic researcher, I have maintained that the genocide carried out in Bosnia and Herzegovina should be viewed as a process that began in 1992, followed a pattern, and culminated with mass violence in Srebrenica. In part, this is due to my belief that genocide is distinguished by how the enemy is understood. Is it the State or a social collective? As Shaw has explained, “genocidal practices... treat social groups as enemies.”

The archives of the war crimes tribunal for the former Yugoslavia remain unexplored by most academic researchers interested in the Western Balkans, but they offer important insights into the criminal minds of individuals who committed genocide and other war crimes in Bosnia and Herzegovina. And it is clear that

for many Serbs tried by the tribunal, Muslims as a group were viewed as the enemy and as the target of genocide.

Transcripts from the parliament of the wartime Bosnian Serb Republic are available, for example, and include discussions by Serb members of the intent and consequences of genocide. In one session, a member was applauded by his fellows when he boasted that the city of Prijedor was no longer a “green” municipality – meaning that it no longer had a Muslim majority. “We fixed them and sent them packing where they belong,” he said. In August 2013, it became clear where these Muslims had been “sent packing” when the largest mass grave to date was discovered in Bosnia and Herzegovina in the village of Tomašica, 17 km south of Prijedor.

Among those who very likely applauded the fact that Prijedor was no longer “green” was Milorad Dodik, then a member of the wartime Bosnian Serb parliament and now a member of the tripartite Bosnian Presidency. While Dodik seemed to retreat from ethno-nationalism in the immediate post-war period, even appearing to be an ally of the West in rebuilding the Bosnian state and working to restore inter-ethnic relations, he has since recommitted to his ethno-nationalistic roots by actively engaging in genocide denial.

It was Dodik who opened the dormitory named after Karadžić in 2016, and Dodik who continues to foster a relationship with Serb youth in Republika Srpska which can only be compared to that of a captor and his hostages, locked in a sort of Stockholm syndrome that keeps young people in the entity captive to an ethno-nationalistic discourse they feel powerless to escape.

Dodik has the open support of Serbian president, Aleksandar Vučić, and heeds the cues of Serbian

leadership more broadly which has led the campaign of Bosnian genocide denial just as it orchestrated the genocide itself under the leadership of Slobodan Milošević. Perhaps it is unsurprising then that Dodik has good relations with leaders like Putin and Orban. But it is problematic that he is treated as a legitimate partner by many European diplomats as well.

After all, in international diplomacy, what is the obligation of a bystander to genocide denial? What is the responsibility of an international actor who fails to intervene? If the EU is in a position to influence officials in Republika Srpska by threatening to end talks until they remove the name of Karadžić from the dormitory in Pale, shouldn't they use this leverage? And if they don't, aren't European leaders complicit now as they were when they looked the other way from "ethnic cleansing" during the war?

The EU must recognise that opportunities to pressure Bosnian Serb and Serbian leaders to treat history objectively should not be wasted. These are not just lost chances to influence educational curricula or encourage inter-ethnic reconciliation; they are openings to pushback against narratives of denial that have become so typical in Bosnia and Herzegovina, especially in the Republika Srpska, that many Serbs are proud to see Karadžić's name publicly celebrated as a "founder of the Republic."

This kind of revisionism transforms war criminals into heroes and makes victims out of aggressors, and if it is not called out by those willing to speak truth to power, it will poison future generations and challenge the prospect of long-term peace in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

# The Four Stages of Bosnian Genocide Denial

HAMZA KARČIĆ\*

ON 10 OCTOBER 2019, the Swedish Academy announced that the Nobel Prize in Literature would go to Peter Handke. The decision sent shockwaves across much of the Balkans. The Austrian author is a Slobodan Milošević apologist and Bosnian genocide denier. Bosnian-American author Aleksandar Hemon called Handke the “Bob Dylan of Genocide Apologists.”

To many, the Swedish Academy conferring such an award to a genocide denier marked a new chapter in the mainstreaming of denial. American journalist Peter Maass who covered the war in the 1990s did an outstanding job of explaining the story behind the Swedish Academy’s scandalous decision.

Bosnian genocide denial has taken many forms from public statements to that effect by politicians to TikTok. But the denial started as early as the genocide

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did, in 1992. In fact, over the last three decades, there have been four identifiable stages of genocide denial.

### **Stage 1: Denial through euphemism**

Starting in the spring of 1992, the term “civil war” was introduced by Serb nationalists and picked up by some Western observers. This term relegated the genocide committed by Bosnian Serb forces against Bosnian Muslims to a mere “civil war”. Along with “civil war”, the term “ethnic cleansing” was invented and applied to Bosnia by journalists and politicians alike.

The sole purpose of the term was to forestall the use of the term genocide lest it mobilise the international community or generate public outcry in support of Bosnians. Through this, Raphael Lemkin’s legacy and the reason he advocated for the Genocide Convention was being cancelled out.

The supreme irony is that ethnic cleansing, introduced as a euphemism, has over the years evolved into an established academic term. It is a testament to the legacy and the success of the first-generation genocide deniers.

In fact, journalists and analysts who subscribed to the notions of a civil war and ethnic cleansing turned out to be those opposed to an international military intervention to stop the bloodshed in Bosnia. Denial through euphemisms is now mostly present in some academic and NGO circles in the Balkans and western Europe.

### **Stage 2: Denial through localisation**

The second stage of genocide denial begins in the early 2000s. The International Criminal Tribunal for

the Former Yugoslavia (ICTY) and the International Court of Justice (ICJ) both established judicial truth in handing down genocide verdicts.

The major shortcoming of these court verdicts was that they narrowed the scale and scope of the three-and-a-half year genocide to a few days in July in Srebrenica in 1995. As some observers have pointed out, the only part of the genocide which was judicially established was that which could not be openly denied.

While establishing judicial truth, the notion of a genocide in Srebrenica – as opposed to a genocide perpetrated against Bosnians in Bosnia from 1992 to 1995 – took hold. This idea of a localised genocide was inexplicably accepted by a number of people in Bosnia and is now present in everyday discourse. The Bosnian genocide through this stage of denial essentially became a municipal genocide in Srebrenica.

Both the ICTY and the ICJ set an exceptionally high benchmark for confirming a genocide. By insisting essentially on a paper trail that would show a clear-cut intention, both of these judicial institutions have enabled future perpetrators of genocide to rest assured that unless they put their statement of purpose in writing, any future court following the line and logic of ICTY will be hard-pressed to hand down a full-fledged court verdict on genocide.

The notion of a ‘genocide in Srebrenica only’ provided an opening for genocide deniers – local, regional and international – to seize and whitewash all the other crimes of genocide committed before July 1995. The localisation of genocide established by international courts became a pathway to denial.

### **Stage 3: Denial through postmodernist discourse**

The third stage began some ten years ago. A variety of actors – with varying degrees of academic and media reach – began denying the bare minimum established by the ICTY. If the ICTY minimised the genocide to a few days in July, the third stage is the denial of this minimum of minimums and is taken up by individuals from entry-level academic beginners to far more sophisticated deniers. The latter are present in academia, media and the NGO world in the region and have employed postmodernist thinking and discourse in the service of genocide denial.

Frequently supported by various international foundations, the sophisticated deniers employed new terms including “alternative narratives”, “multiple truths”, “multiple narratives” and so on and so forth. These relegate a genocide to just one of many narratives.

While the open deniers such as Serbian far-right politician Vojislav Seselj are more provocative, the sophisticated deniers are far more damaging because their influence is far more pervasive. Some local historians and researchers in Bosnia joined the postmodernist bandwagon in joint research projects that sought to write joint histories or that sought to offer multiple narratives about the war and genocide in the 1990s. They either became unwitting accomplices or they simply failed to grasp the essence of postmodernist denial.

### **Stage 4: Denial through mainstreaming**

The latest stage kicked off in December 2019 when the Swedish Academy decided to award the Nobel Prize in Literature to Peter Handke. This marked the latest stage of denial and the Swedish Academy’s active role in it.

Up until December 2019, deniers were for the most part on the fringes of society – where they rightfully belong. But, with Handke, deniers are being brought in from the cold and have become welcome in the mainstream. The Swedish Academy has enabled the migration of fringe deniers to the mainstream. In essence, the fourth stage can be summarised simply as mainstreaming.

These four stages evolved sequentially but their defining features are now present simultaneously. The effort to maintain and preserve the historical truth about the Bosnian genocide is therefore shaping up as a major priority for Bosnian and international scholars, journalists and policymakers.

# Has the World Learned From Its Failures at Srebrenica?

DAVID J. SIMON\*

THE 25<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY of the Genocide at Srebrenica is a solemn occasion --- one on which Bosnians and the international community contemplate the scars left by that event. Many of those scars are personal, but some are also institutional, or systemic. Indeed, the genocide at Srebrenica left the international community – especially, but not only, the United Nations – with a legacy it must confront in the wake of its failure.

As then-UN Secretary General Kofi Annan wrote of its reckoning with the legacy of Srebrenica is in the 1999 Report of the Secretary General:

No one laments more than we the failure of the international community to take decisive action. ...The tragedy of Srebrenica will haunt our history forever.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Report of the Secretary-General pursuant to General Assembly resolution 53/35, UN Document A/54/549; ¶1503)

He went on:

In the end, the only meaningful and lasting amends we can make to the citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina who put their faith in the international community is to do our utmost not to allow such horrors to recur.<sup>2</sup>

My goal here is to assess the outcome of that implicit promise, asking what has been done to prevent such horrors from recurring, and have those steps been effective?

Global efforts to reckon with the United Nations – and, more broadly, the international community’s – failures in Bosnia, as well as those in Rwanda in 1994 have two major components.

The first component involves institutional changes. These include efforts to make sure that the risk of genocide is not overlooked simply because that prospect is either unimaginable, or unimaginable according to the institutional mandate of a given organization.

Within the United Nations, Annan created a new position, the Special Advisor for the Prevention of Genocide, and with it a new office (the Office of the Special Advisor for the Prevention of Genocide, or the Office of Genocide Prevention) charged with anticipating genocide risks, both generic and specific. The Special Advisor’s organizational proximity to the Secretary General brings access both the SG himself and to the Security Council and national delegations to the UN. While the office itself is relatively small (compared to something like the UN Development Program, or Human Rights Commission), but it plays a significant role in maintaining an early warning

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<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*; ¶1504.

model, collecting, and disseminating atrocity-related information within the UN system, and engaging (diplomatically as it can) in public advocacy.<sup>3</sup>

The Special Advisor and the Office of Genocide Prevention serve as something of a conceptual model for an analogous development at the national level: the development of National Focal Points. These are offices who are tasked with recognizing the potential intersect between national policies and genocide risk. Sometimes that means identifying opportunities for prevention. In other cases, that means noting where policies, whether foreign or domestic in nature, might actually exacerbate genocide risk directly.<sup>4</sup>

Finally, after 1999 there has been an upsurge in civil society organizations devoted to genocide prevention, such as the Global Center for the Responsibility to Protect, Enough!, the Auschwitz Institute for the Prevention of Genocide and Mass Atrocities, the Stanley Foundation, and the Asia Pacific Centre for the Responsibility to Protect. The roles they take on include analyzing genocide risk, identifying prevention needs and opportunities, raising awareness of situations of genocide risk and/or prevention activities, and pressuring government and international institutions to take preventive action.

The second component of global efforts to reckon with the atrocity failures of the 1990s are more ideological and doctrinal than institutional.

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<sup>3</sup> For an elaboration of the role and potential of both the Special Advisor and the office, see Deborah Mayersen, "Current and potential capacity for the prevention of genocide and mass atrocities within the United Nations system," *Global Responsibility to Protect* 3, no. 2 (2011): 197-222.

<sup>4</sup> For more, see Monica Serrano, "National Focal Points for R2P," *The Responsibility to Prevent: Overcoming the Challenges of Atrocity Prevention* (2015): 83.

The first, and often less-noticed, of these is a new approach to peacekeeping, one that recognizes that “neutrality” is not the be-all-and-end-all of the enterprise. Instead, according to the Brahimi Report of 2000, peacekeeping missions must have (among other recommendations) 1) robust rules of engagement (including the ability to defend themselves), and 2) clear, credible, and achievable mandates.<sup>5</sup>

The second is it is the advent of the doctrine of the Responsibility to Protect, or R2P. As articulated in the Secretary General’s 2009 report<sup>6</sup>, the doctrine affirms that

- States have a responsibility to protect their own people from the commission of atrocities against them (and that the international community has a responsibility to help states do just that);

And furthermore that,

- The international community has a responsibility to step in and protect any and all peoples facing such threats when the state is unable or unwilling to take protective measures itself.

The doctrine, if adhered to, promises a commitment to acting on behalf of threatened civilian populations, in stark contrast – ideally, anyway – to the inaction of the UN and its member states in 1994 in Rwanda and 1995 at Srebrenica.

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<sup>5</sup> United Nations Panel on United Nations Peace Operations, chaired by Lakhdar Brahimi, “Comprehensive review of the whole question of peacekeeping operations in all their aspects,” reported to the U.N. Secretary-General on 17 August 2000: *U.N. Doc. A/55/305*

<sup>6</sup> UN General Assembly, “Implementing the responsibility to protect: report of the Secretary-General,” 12 January 2009, *A/63/677*,

As welcome as these developments may be, the question remains whether they have made any difference at all?

The persistence all kinds of different signs of atrocity risks – and actual atrocity – and may lead on to a pessimistic assessment. It is more accurate, though, to recognize that some of these developments have made some difference, but just not enough.

The differences that have been made are often small, upstream, and hard to detect (and hard to award credit for even if they are detectable). For example, the UN Office of Genocide Prevention has been able to identify genocide risk situations and advise parties to de-escalate before genocidal dynamics held sway. Efforts led by UN actors in places like Cote d'Ivoire, Burundi, and Kyrgyzstan have – arguably – prevented atrocities when they appeared imminent.

Bilateral actions also reflect some internalization of the Responsibility to Protect Doctrine. For example, the US's Mt. Sinjar airlift may have been late for many Yazidis, and came after other forces had abjectly failed, but it did save the lives of many of those who were under attack.

Global civil society managed, for a while in the late 2000s, to put pressure on the government of Sudan to cease its support for the genocidal onslaught against the people of Darfur. One result, arguably, was the International Criminal Court's opening of an investigation into the Bashir regime, and its ultimate issuance of a warrant for the arrest of Bashir on genocide charges. Sudanese civil society would deal the most consequential blow to the Omar Bashir regime, though, resulting in the latter's overthrow in 2019. Meanwhile, UN peacekeepers did an admirable

job in Sierra Leone and Liberia once they were able to adhere to something like the Brahimi principles.<sup>7</sup>

Significantly, however, the efforts to actualize the Responsibility to Protect doctrine have not been enough. Consider the Rohingya refugees from Myanmar, more than a million of which have been chased from their homes and their country into Bangladesh, where they face an uncertain future. They merit protection from the Myanmar government, but find themselves fleeing it, instead. The shortcomings in the global order are also evident to the people of Syria and Iraq targeted by an array of nefarious forces, including at times their own governments, as well as non-governmental actors whose ideology is explicitly genocidal. The weakness of the Responsibility to Protect doctrine is foreboding for the anglophones of Cameroon, facing a bloody and indiscriminate crackdown on a political movement for greater autonomy, and for various populations in Ethiopia, each at risk of getting caught in the figurative and literal crossfire between forces mobilized by government and opposition elites. Finally, it looms large for the Uighur population of western China, who have been subjected to persecution in the forms of limitations on movement, forced re-location and re-education, and population control.

In each of these cases, the new regime –the post-Srebrenica regime has failed.

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<sup>7</sup> For more, at least on the Sierra Leone case, see Clifford Bernath and Sayre Nyce, "A peacekeeping success: Lessons learned from UNAMSIL," *Journal of International Peacekeeping* 8, no. 1 (2004): 119-142. For a broader evaluation, see Lauren Durand, "How Did the Brahimi Report Improve the Effectiveness of UN Peacekeeping Operations," *E-International Relations* 5, no. 8 (2012): 56-70.

Some common themes regarding the failure of the new world order emerge from these cases. First, there remains a pro-sovereignty bias remains, as powerful actors at the Security Council are ever-inclined to protect their friends in places like Myanmar (where UN Special Rapporteur has been barred from entering), and Syria (where even the weakest tool in the arsenal – the threat of post-conflict indictment – has been blunted by Assad’s friends on the Security Council).

Moreover, the doctrine of the Responsibility to Protect has been misused. For example, US President George Bush cited R2P to validate its invasion of Iraq.<sup>8</sup> Later, the Russian government used it to validate invasions of Georgia and Ukraine.<sup>9</sup> The doctrine also served as cover for a bombing campaign in Libya, even though the objectives of that campaign rapidly evolved from “protection” (per UN Security Council Resolution 1973) to regime change.<sup>10</sup>

Can the global response to atrocities and atrocity risk be salvaged? If it can, a new global will to stand up to atrocities must be found. After all, the technical capacity to assess and understand risk may be greater than it ever was, but the political will to act on it is as weak as ever. To some extent, therefore, the impetus

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<sup>8</sup> Moses, Jeremy, Babak Bahador, and Tessa Wright. “The Iraq War and the responsibility to protect: uses, abuses and consequences for the future of humanitarian intervention.” *Journal of intervention and statebuilding* 5, no. 4 (2011): 347-367.

<sup>9</sup> Ziegler, Charles E. “Russia on the rebound: using and misusing the Responsibility to Protect.” *International Relations* 30, no. 3 (2016): 346-361.

<sup>10</sup> Hehir, Aidan. “The permanence of inconsistency: Libya, the Security Council, and the Responsibility to Protect.” *International Security* 38, no. 1 (2013): 137-159.

to push for change remains with global civil society, which must advocate for more robust implementation of the post-Srebrenica ideals.

Ultimately, institutions must undergo substantial reform to be able to address it better. Beyond the creation of well-meaning and insight-producing offices like the UNOGP, there is a need for real structural change, starting with the Security Council, and supported by those international actors who recognize the value – the urgency – of institutionalizing atrocity prevention in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. These steps are nothing less than debts owed to the victims of genocide 25 years ago.

# Srebrenica Genocide Denial: From Dodik to TikTok

HIKMET KARČIĆ\*

SOMETIME AROUND MARCH 7, 2021 a banner appeared in the eastern Bosnian town of Bratunac, a few kilometres from Srebrenica, infamous for the July 1995 genocide of Bosniak Muslims by Serb forces.

The banner read “Happy Birthday, long and healthy life”, along with the photos of Ratko Mladić, the Bosnian Serb general who orchestrated the genocide and Milorad Dodik, Bosnian Serb strongman and current member of the Bosnia and Herzegovina presidency.

The two shared the same birth date, March 15. Since 2006, Dodik has held political power; initially even referred to as a “breath of fresh air” by the international community. Besides being anti-EU and anti-NATO oriented, he is on the record for genocidal and Islamophobic rhetoric.

This rhetoric however is not only limited to the Bosnian Serb politician but is widespread online, exposing millions to lies, disinformation, and historical revisionism.

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The Srebrenica Genocide, which resulted in the execution of 8,372 Bosniaks has been the subject of criminal proceedings against Bosnian Serb perpetrators at the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia (ICTY) and Bosnia and Herzegovina Courts. However, since the 2010s, the denial of Srebrenica and other atrocities has become much more institutionalised and systematic not only in Bosnia and Herzegovina but also in neighbouring Serbia.

For example, two years ago, the Bosnian and Herzegovinian entity of Republika Srpska established two “truth Commissions” which were assigned to research the suffering of Serbs in Srebrenica and in Sarajevo.

Members of these Commissions are well known revisionists and Islamophobes who are no strangers to perpetuating and even contributing to conspiracy theories. The “experts” goal is to reinforce false claims which only further traumatises victims and their families. Although the “findings” of these Commissions were scheduled to be published in 2020, nothing has happened to date, whether due to Covid-19 or something else.

Moreover, the culture of denialism has also gone mainstream, glorifying convicted perpetrators in some instances. This phenomenon has become so widespread that a few years ago, my colleague, Bosnian-Australian scholar, Hariz Halilovic, coined the term triumphalism, which covers all the dynamics of celebrating not only perpetrators but their legacy – in this case, the ethnically cleansed Republika Srpska entity.

In recent years, this triumphalism has become extremely attractive for the global far-right. Terror attacks by right-wing extremists and white supremacists from Oslo and Halle to Christchurch were inspired by Serb nationalists ideology. This extremist rhetoric spreads

online like fire with disastrous consequences far beyond the borders of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Several memes inspired by the Bosnian Genocide have been adopted by far-right extremists online – the most infamous being the “remove kebab” meme.

This meme originated from a Serb war time militaristic song titled “*Karadžić, lead your Serbs*”. This song is considered an informal anthem of the global far-right, while the term “kebab” which was later added by internet trolls, serves as a slur for Muslims. This very same song inspired, and was played in 2019 by the New Zealand terrorist en route to the two mosques where he ultimately live streamed the massacres he committed.

A short look at social media, notably Instagram and TikTok, demonstrates the staggering extent of Bosnian Genocide denial and far-right extremism that Generation Z is exposed to. The lengthy genocidal history and far-right attacks are not only shortened to palatable 60-second videos, but are further manipulated and edited in ways that compel youth enough to stick through and watch.

Those who question these incendiary posts are often bullied and ostracised from the platforms. A lack of censorship in combination with the propensity of these videos on social media platforms makes countering this medium of extremism feel like a Sisyphean feat.

The international community failed Bosnia and Herzegovina in preventing the atrocities committed during the 90s. Today, while Bosnians struggle against revisionist rhetoric, they feel like they are being failed again.

Although the atrocities ended 25 years ago, this does not mean that it ended for the survivors. The recent events in Montenegro, the electoral victory of Serb nationalists, was accompanied by Islamophobic remarks and Srebrenica Genocide denial.

This, however, is not an isolated case as in the last quarter of the century, the denial of atrocities committed in Bosnia and Herzegovina was subject not only of the far-right but also at one point of certain pockets of leftist academia. Some Western anti-interventionists academics opted not only to support the Milošević regime but also to deny the obvious atrocities which were committed by Serb forces for the purpose of criticising US and NATO interventions in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo. A general trend of Bosnian genocide denial demonstrates that the events in Bosnia and Herzegovina are instrumentalised by the far-right that glorifies the atrocities, while certain left-wing apologists deny them ever happening.

The same recipe is cooking today in more recent atrocities worldwide, especially in Syria. Except now with mass media and online trolling, it has become much more sophisticated. It is no wonder today you can see certain members of the far-right supporting Syrian regime leader Bashar al Assad while certain leftists deny the crimes occurring in Syria – or point to the regime as a victim of an imperialist plot. Where have we heard that before?

The “othering” of Muslims by far-right ideology, if left undealt with, may have deadly consequences, not limited only to Muslims, but all other minorities. There is a thin line between Islamophobia and anti-Muslim bigotry and dehumanisation and violence. And it escalates very quickly. Bosniaks learnt it a quarter of a century ago.

As we approach the 26th anniversary of the Srebrenica genocide, the front against historical revisionism is not only in the streets of Bratunac but, and just as dangerously, it has spread its tentacles all over the internet.

# Examining the Benchmarks by Which to Evaluate the ICTY's Legacy and Lessons for the Future

JENNIFER TRAHAN\*

THIS CHAPTER DISCUSSES the benchmarks or measurements by which to evaluate the legacy of the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (“ICTY”).<sup>1</sup> It is my pleasure to contribute this chapter as part of a volume to commemorate the solemn occasion of the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Srebrenica genocide. I write in full acknowledgment that the existence of a tribunal, any tribunal, *after* the crimes have occurred, is never a substitute for the international community intervening in the first

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\* Clinical Professor, The Center for Global Affairs, NYU-SPS. This short chapter distills and expands on the findings from a lengthier chapter, “Examining the Benchmarks by which to Evaluate the ICTY’s Legacy,” in *The Legacy of Ad Hoc Tribunals in International Criminal Law: Assessing the ICTY’s and ICTR’s Most Significant Legal Accomplishments*, edited by Milena Sterio and Michael Scharf (Cambridge University Press 2019).

<sup>1</sup> The full name is The International Tribunal for the Prosecution of Persons Responsible for Serious Violations of International Humanitarian Law Committed in the Territory of the Former Yugoslavia since 1991.

place to prevent the crimes. The entire field of international justice is always a second best alternative to robust action to ensure that crimes are not committed, as should have happened, given the duty of States Parties to the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (“Genocide Convention”)<sup>2</sup> to “prevent” genocide, a duty that was clearly violated at Srebrenica.

Examination of the measurements for evaluating the ICTY’s legacy serves two purposes. First, it is relevant to assessing the ICTY’s performance. Second, it could potentially provide guidance for measuring the success of tribunals more broadly and thus provide lessons learned for the future.

This chapter concludes that the ICTY has proven to be quite a successful institution when one examines judicial or prosecutorial goals. Examining broader, socially transformative goals – which arguably should not necessarily be metrics by which to measure the success for tribunals – one sees the ICTY making some accomplishments but not meeting all the goals that might have been projected for it.

The chapter also draws lessons learned from the experience of the ICTY as to expectations and measurements of success for current and future tribunals. The chapter simultaneously acknowledges that since the ICTY was created, political support for the field of international justice – particularly, prosecuting atrocity crimes through international and hybrid tribunals – appears to have declined at the international level. Accordingly, it may become difficult for future tribunals to replicate the ICTY’s accomplishments.

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<sup>2</sup> Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, Dec. 9, 1948, 78 U.N.T.S. 277.

To some extent, the international community unfortunately appears to have shifted its focus to far less ambitious endeavors for addressing atrocity crimes.

### **Benchmarks By Which To Evaluate Legacy**

Initially, in evaluating the success of a tribunal it appears appropriate to first consider: by what measurements or metrics does one conduct such an evaluation? What one expects a tribunal to achieve will of course influence the assessment of its performance. Unnecessarily optimistic or unrealistic expectations may lead to disappointment, although that is not necessarily the tribunal's failure, but the failure of those who promulgated the expectations.

Clearly, first and foremost, an international tribunal exists to achieve justice; international and hybrid tribunals are, at heart, judicial institutions or courts. Indeed, the UN Security Council – the ICTY's "mandate providing entity" – held out when it created the ICTY that it would bring "justice."<sup>3</sup> The resolution creating the ICTY additionally suggested that the ICTY was created to respond to a "threat to international peace and security" and would "contribute to ensuring that... violations are halted,"<sup>4</sup> which suggests a deterrence function. The resolution creating the ICTY did not state that it would create "reconciliation" but its sister tribunal, the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda ("ICTR"), in its founding resolution stated that the ICTR would do so.<sup>5</sup> Thereafter, ICTY officials (for example, the

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<sup>3</sup> S.C. Res. 827, U.N. Doc. S/RES/827 (25 May 1993).

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> S.C. Res. 955, U.N. Doc. S/RES/955 (8 November 1994).

ICTY President)<sup>6</sup> added this expectation that the ICTY would create “reconciliation.” When the ICTY and ICTR were adopting their “completion strategies,” the focus for the ICTY shifted to (1) finishing high-level cases; (2) assisting in building domestic capacity; and (3) helping to create the hybrid War Crimes Chamber of the State Court in Bosnia.<sup>7</sup>

### **Benchmarks for Measuring Judicial or Prosecutorial Accomplishments**

Examining “judicial or prosecutorial” (justice-related) accomplishments suggests that the ICTY has proven to be quite a successful institution. This conclusion rests upon a number of factors.

#### *The ICTY’s conducting high-level prosecutions pursuant to internationally recognized fair trial standards*

In terms of prosecutions, certainly, one of the ICTY’s core accomplishments has been bringing some measure of justice to the victims in the former Yugoslavia through its prosecutions of high-level perpetrators, with trials conducted pursuant to internationally recognized fair

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<sup>6</sup> See, e.g., Seventh Annual Report of the President of the ICTY to the U.N. Security Council, U.N. doc. AI55/273-S/20001777, 7 August 2000, para. 217; Annual Rep. of the Int’l Tribunal for the Prosecution of Persons Responsible for Serious Violations of Int’l Humanitarian Law Committed in the Territory of the Former Yugoslavia, U.N. Doc. A/49/342, S/1994/1007, 29 August 1994, para. 16, at [http://www.icty.org/x/file/About/Reports%20and%20Publications/AnnualReports/annual\\_report\\_1994\\_en.pdf](http://www.icty.org/x/file/About/Reports%20and%20Publications/AnnualReports/annual_report_1994_en.pdf).

<sup>7</sup> S.C. Res. 1503, U.N. Doc. S/RES/1503 (29 August 2003).

trial standards.<sup>8</sup> Of course, the ICTY has only brought “some measure” of justice because there remain many more prosecutions that have been and continue to be pursued at the national level.<sup>9</sup>

The high-level perpetrators prosecuted before the ICTY include Radovan Karadžić, Ratko Mladić, Slobodan Milošević, Biljana Plavšić, and Croatian General Ante Gotovina. On the Bosnian-Muslim side, the most well-known prosecution would probably be that of Naser Orić; the most well-known prosecution on the Kosovo Liberation Army (“KLA”) side would be of Ramush Haradinaj. Admittedly, not all of those trials ended in successful convictions, with former Serbian President Slobodan Milošević dying towards the end of his trial, and the Orić, Gotovina, and Haradinaj cases resulting in acquittals.<sup>10</sup> Yet, international and hybrid tribunal trials do not always end in convictions; indeed, one aspect of fair trials is that not all cases will end in convictions. Some cases also may result in acquittal due to poor reasoning (Perišić)<sup>11</sup> or apparent

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<sup>8</sup> Updated Statute of the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia, Art. 21 (“Rights of the Accused”) (September 2009), at [https://www.icty.org/x/file/Legal%20Library/Statute/statute\\_sept09\\_en.pdf](https://www.icty.org/x/file/Legal%20Library/Statute/statute_sept09_en.pdf).

<sup>9</sup> *But see* Cain Burdeau, “Experts Say Many Balkan War Crimes Will Never Be Prosecuted,” COURTHOUSE NEWS SERVICE, Sept. 18, 2018, at <https://www.courthousenews.com/experts-say-many-balkan-war-crimes-will-never-be-prosecuted/>.

<sup>10</sup> *Prosecutor v Orić* (Appeals Chamber Judgment), ICTY-IT-03-68-A (3 July 2008); *Prosecutor v Gotovina* (Appeals Chamber Judgment) ICTY-IT-06-90-A (16 November 2012); *Prosecutor v Haradinaj* (Judgment) ICTY-IT-04-84-T (3 April 2008).

<sup>11</sup> *See* J. Trahan and E. Lovall, “The ICTY Appellate Chamber’s Acquittal of Momčilo Perišić: The Specific Direction Element of Aiding and Abetting Should be Rejected or Modified to Explicitly Include a ‘Reasonable Person’ Due Diligence Standard,” 40 *Brooklyn Journal of International Law* 171 (2015).

witness intimidation (Haradinaj).<sup>12</sup> Thus, despite not all of these high-level prosecutions having ended entirely successfully, it is notwithstanding extremely significant that the ICTY pursued these cases, showcasing, at minimum, the rule of law functioning (that even high-level perpetrators are subject to the rule of law), and hopefully bringing some measure of satisfaction to victims.

*The ICTY's success in having all of its indictees in its main cases apprehended*

As the International Criminal Court ("ICC") struggles with a number of outstanding arrest warrants,<sup>13</sup> one realizes, particularly in hindsight, what a significant accomplishment it was that the ICTY had every single one of its indictees in its main cases arrested and brought to The Hague for trial.<sup>14</sup> One can enumerate this an accomplishment of the ICTY, although it was of course more precisely the work of various police forces, peacekeepers, and military forces who conducted the arrest operations.<sup>15</sup> Notwithstanding, this is still a

<sup>12</sup> See Marija Ristic, "Can the New Kosovo Court Keep Witnesses Safe?," *Balkan Transitional Justice* (20 January 2016), at <http://www.balkaninsight.com/en/article/can-the-new-kosovo-court-keep-witnesses-safe--01-20-2016> ("In her memoirs, as well as in her many reports to the UN Security Council, [former ICTY Prosecutor Carla] Del Ponte said that she believes the intimidation of witnesses seriously affected the verdicts in the cases against senior KLA officials Fatmir Limaj and Ramush Haradinaj – both of whom were acquitted.").

<sup>13</sup> ICC, "Situations and Cases, Defendants at Large," at <https://www.icc-cpi.int/defendants?k=At%20large>.

<sup>14</sup> ICTY, "Infographic: ICTY Facts & Figures," at <http://www.icty.org/en/content/infographic-icty-facts-figures>.

<sup>15</sup> For a detailed account of various key arrests, see Julian Borger, *The Butcher's Trail: How the Search for Balkan War Criminals Became The World's Most Successful Manhunt* (Other Press, 2016).

strong track-record for a tribunal and also somewhat indicative of the international community's support for the ICTY, a topic explored further below.

It is worth observing that these arrests did not simply materialize spontaneously but resulted from significant numbers of arrest operations coupled with a “conditionality” policy. That is, initially, the United States conditioned financial assistance to countries in the region on their cooperation with the ICTY, including in surrendering indictees.<sup>16</sup> Later, the European Union (“EU”) took up this pressure, requiring such cooperation as a condition for countries to progress towards EU accession.<sup>17</sup> This example can provide valuable lessons for other tribunals, such as the ICC, that arrests sometimes require “incentivization” – that is, the imposition of economic costs or other similar measures on countries that fail to execute arrest warrants. One could also tackle the problem through the use of more sealed indictments, something the ICTY also employed.<sup>18</sup>

*The ICTY's creation of an extensive body  
of generally well-reasoned jurisprudence*

The ICTY has produced a wealth of well-reasoned jurisprudence through its trial and appellate judgments

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<sup>16</sup> J. Kim, “Balkan Cooperation on War Crimes Issues” (US Cong. Research Serv., RS 22097, 2008); S. Woehrel, “Conditions on U.S. Aid to Serbia” (US Cong. Research Serv., RS 21686, 2008).

<sup>17</sup> N. Wentholt, “Mirroring Transitional Justice: Construction and Impact of European Union ICTY-Conditionality,” 65(1) *Südosteuropa* (2017).

<sup>18</sup> *See, e.g.*, ICTY Press Release, “Milorad Krnojelac Detained Under Sealed Indictment and Transferred to the International Tribunal” (15 June 1998).

and other rulings.<sup>19</sup> This jurisprudence includes extensive rulings on the required elements of the crimes of genocide, crimes against humanity, and war crimes, as well as forms of individual and command responsibility, and other issues, such as due process/ fair trial rights, evidentiary rulings, sentencing standards, aggravating and mitigating factors, and appellate review.<sup>20</sup> This body of jurisprudence provides a tremendous legacy for other international and hybrid tribunals as well as domestic courts prosecuting war crimes, crimes against humanity, or genocide cases. The judgments are generally extremely well-written and well-reasoned, with perhaps a few exceptions, such as the Gotovina and Perišić acquittals mentioned above, and the initial Šešelj acquittal.<sup>21</sup>

*The ICTY's focus on previously under-reported and under-documented crimes such as sexual and gender based violence*

It is of course a tragic testament to how the war was conducted that this jurisprudence needed to be developed; yet, in the face of extensive sexual and gender-based violence (“SGBV”), the ICTY responded by bringing a significant number of cases including SGBV charges.<sup>22</sup> The judges in turn issued ground-breaking rulings that rape constitutes a war crime, a crime

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<sup>19</sup> For a compilation of the case law, see J Trahan, *Genocide, War Crimes and Crimes Against Humanity: A Topical Digest of the Case-law of the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia* (Human Rights Watch 2006).

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>21</sup> *Prosecutor v Šešelj* (Trial Chamber Judgment) Case No. IT-03-67-T (31 March 2016).

<sup>22</sup> See S. Brammertz and M. Jarvis (eds), *Prosecuting Conflict-Related Sexual Violence* (Oxford University Press 2016).

against humanity, and a form of torture.<sup>23</sup> The ICTR additionally, and very significantly, adjudicated that rape constitutes a form of genocide.<sup>24</sup> The ICTY also pursued cases solely involving SGBV charges (such as regarding the rape camp in Foča),<sup>25</sup> and the ICTY also pursued cases involving male SGBV,<sup>26</sup> also an under-reported and under-prosecuted crime. These rulings are significant in themselves and for the victims of such crimes, but they also help establish the important expectation that tribunals necessarily must include such charges in their indictments. With such rulings having already been rendered, other tribunals also have no need to deliver ground-breaking law but may rest on solid, pre-established precedent.

*The ICTY's having nearly 5,000 victims and witnesses testify, allowing their voices to be heard*

Admittedly, the ICTY was not designed to be particularly “victim- or witness-centric” – that is, victims were required to be called as witnesses for the prosecution or the defense in order to be permitted to testify as they lacked independent standing to appear. Yet, despite

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<sup>23</sup> *Prosecutor v Kunarac*, (Appeals Chamber Judgment) ICTY-IT-96-23, 23/1A (12 June 2002); *Prosecutor v Kvočka* (Trial Chamber Judgment) ICTY-IT-98-30/1 (2 November 2001); *aff'd on appeal* (Appeals Chamber Judgment) ICTY-IT-98-30/1-A (28 February 2005).

<sup>24</sup> *Prosecutor: Akayesu* (Trial Chamber Judgment) Case No. ICTR-96-4-T (2 September 1998), *aff'd on appeal* (Appeals Chamber Judgment) (1 June 2001).

<sup>25</sup> *Prosecutor v Kunarac* (Trial Chamber Judgment) ICTY-IT-96-23, 23/1 (22 February 2001).

<sup>26</sup> *Tadić* was the first case to consider sexual violence against men during war. Sexual violence against men was also examined in other ICTY cases, including *Češić*, *Mucić*, *Todorović*, and *Simić*.

that, one could consider it a significant accomplishment that the ICTY had nearly 5,000 victims and witnesses testify,<sup>27</sup> most of whom hailed from the region. While other tribunals grant victims independent standing to appear, such as the ICC,<sup>28</sup> the ICTY has actually had far more victims and witnesses testify in its courtrooms.

*The ICTY's establishing a solid historical record and extensive documentary archive*

While this chapter later discusses the continuing problem of “denial” and “partial denial” of crimes and that the ICTY’s work has not silenced such denial, the ICTY has at least created a solid historical record and extensive documentary archive substantiating evidence of the crimes committed. If those in the region desire to be informed, be they historians, scholars, activists, journalists, or even ordinary citizens, there is a wealth of materials available. That the ICTY’s evidence is available in a vast, searchable electronic database is an accomplishment no other tribunal to date has yet achieved.<sup>29</sup> It is also significant that this documentary archive is available to local war crimes prosecutors in the region and could be utilized in prosecutions of persons from the former Yugoslavia abroad (universal jurisdiction cases or domestic cases brought under other theories of jurisdiction).

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<sup>27</sup> ICTY, “Witness Statistics” (2015), at <http://www.icty.org/en/about/registry/witnesses/statistics>.

<sup>28</sup> Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, U.N. Doc. A/CONF.183/9\*, 18 July 1998, as amended, Art. 68.

<sup>29</sup> See Iva Vukušić, “The Archives of the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia,” 98 *Journal of the Historical Association* 623 (2013); UN “ICTY Court Records,” at <http://icr.icty.org/default.aspx>.

*The ICTY's contributing to rule of law through its own work, capacity-building in the region, and more globally*

The ICTY has additionally contributed to the development of the rule of law in at least three ways. First, very significantly, as mentioned, its own work demonstrated the rule of law functioning in that the ICTY was able to conduct high-level atrocity crimes prosecutions pursuant to internationally recognized fair trial standards.

Second, the ICTY contributed to capacity-building in the region, particularly in its assistance in the formation of the hybrid War Crimes Chamber of the State Court in Bosnia, as well as training and other programs such as evidence-sharing with other local courts in the region.<sup>30</sup>

Third, at the international level, the ICTY (and ICTR) played a significant role in essentially resuscitating the field of international justice that had lain dormant since the prosecutions before the International Military Tribunal at Nuremberg and the International Military Tribunal for the Far East (Tokyo). The *ad hoc* tribunals additionally helped set the precedent that led to the formation of the ICC – that is, the creation of the ICTY and ICTR helped demonstrate that there could be a permanent international criminal court. The existence of the *ad hoc* tribunals also helped pave the way for the creation of hybrid tribunals which have been or are pursuing prosecutions of crimes committed in Sierra Leone, Cambodia, Lebanon, Kosovo, and the Central African Republic.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> ICTY, “Achievements,” at <http://www.icty.org/en/about/tribunal/achievements>.

<sup>31</sup> These tribunals are The Special Court for Sierra Leone, The Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia, The Special Tribunal for Lebanon, The Kosovo Specialist Chambers and Specialist Prosecutor’s Office, and The Special Criminal Court in the Central African Republic.

All in all, this presents quite a formidable record of success. It is unfortunate though that more of the public in the region does not regard the ICTY as successful.<sup>32</sup> As discussed below, the political climate, particularly in some parts of the former Yugoslavia, has impeded acceptance of the ICTY's work as well as the implementation of other transitional justice measures.

### **Whether to Include Benchmarks for Measuring Socially Transformative Goals**

When examining benchmarks or goals that no longer relate to justice but which seek to serve broader “socially transformative” purposes, one concludes that the ICTY has had a mixed record of success. This conclusion rests on a number of observations. As expanded on below, the ICTY was able to make contributions to international peace and security and was able to make a modest contribution to deterrence, but only late in the life of the tribunal and not during the early years of its existence. On the other hand, there is little evidence that the ICTY's work caused reconciliation and there is also no single, accepted shared-narrative in the region regarding the war or crimes committed and denial of crimes continues notwithstanding the ICTY's work.

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<sup>32</sup> For a full discussion of such views and how to factor them into an evaluation of the ICTY's legacy, see Jennifer Trahan, “Examining the Benchmarks by which to Evaluate the ICTY's Legacy,” in Sterio & Scharf *supra*.

While I conclude that negative views do not impact on measuring the ICTY's *actual* performance, a more pessimistic assessment is reach in Marko Milanović, “Establishing the Facts About Mass Atrocities: Accounting for the Failure of the ICTY to Persuade Target Audiences,” 47 *Georgetown Journal of International Law* 1321 (2016).

Yet, one might first inquire whether furthering international peace and security, contributing to deterrence, bringing about reconciliation, or silencing denial are appropriate goals for tribunals. Arguably they are not. For example, the Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia (“ECCC”) (which to date has tried three perpetrators in their eighties),<sup>33</sup> probably did not contribute to peace in Cambodia, which was largely peaceful by the time of their trials; thus, while that tribunal has faced other difficulties (and successes),<sup>34</sup> it would appear inappropriate to evaluate the ECCC’s legacy by whether it advanced peace and security. Sometimes tribunals may be in a position to do so, but not always. Similarly, tribunals may or may not be in a position to create deterrence, depending on factors such as how serious the threat and likelihood of prosecution appear to be at the time of the contemplated crime(s). Additionally, as discussed further below, there is nothing about trials that necessarily brings about “reconciliation”; accordingly, that arguably is a wholly inappropriate expectation to foist upon tribunals.

### *Contributing to international peace and security*

While arguably a tribunal should not need to contribute to international peace and security to be measured as successful, it is generally acknowledged that by issuing high-level indictments, such as those

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<sup>33</sup> Website of the Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia, “Case Load,” at <https://www.eccc.gov.kh/en/case-load>.

<sup>34</sup> See Open Society Justice Initiative, “Performance and Perception: The Impact of the Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia,” at <https://www.opensocietyfoundations.org/sites/default/files/performance-perception-eccc-20160211.pdf>.

against Radovan Karadžić and Ratko Mladić,<sup>35</sup> the ICTY *did* contribute to peace and security in the region. Mladić eventually went into hiding and Karadžić was left posing as a new age healer; they were thereby clearly marginalized from playing any continuing roles in the affairs of Republika Srpska and in no position to commit further crimes. At the same time, it is extraordinarily difficult to conclusively demonstrate that the region is more stable because these (or other) individuals were indicted. One simply cannot know what the region would have been like absent their indictments or the indictment, for example, of Slobodan Milošević.

Note the difficulty if one strives always to prove benefits through quantitative analysis (as political scientists often attempt to do); absent quantitative proof some might (incorrectly) conclude that the ICTY failed to contribute to peace and security. Arguably, there are some positive impacts of tribunals that are not susceptible to quantitative measurement. One cannot know how stable the region would be today had the ICTY never existed. Thus, one cannot determine what kind of “peace dividend” the ICTY may have yielded. Similarly, what benefit has been derived from showing the rule of law at work? What is the value for the future of establishing jurisprudence on SGBV that, for example, might be used in future prosecutions of crimes against the Yazidis? These kinds of contributions cannot be measured, yet the absence of quantitative measurement does not suggest there was no benefit.

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<sup>35</sup> *Prosecutor v Radovan Karadžić and Ratko Mladić*, Initial Indictment, IT-95-5-I, 24 (July 1995) (Bosnia & Herzegovina); *Prosecutor v Radovan Karadžić and Ratko Mladić*, Initial Indictment, IT-95-5-I (14 Nov 1995) (Srebrenica).

### *Deterrence*

As to deterrence, one must admit that generally one observes the ICTY creating very little. For example, the worst single atrocity of the war – in and around Srebrenica commencing July 11, 1995 – occurred well after the ICTY’s creation. Clearly, the Tribunal’s existence did not deter that tragedy nor many others. (Furthermore, if there was any deterrence in other locations, it again is very hard to demonstrate as it is difficult to prove a negative – that some crimes did not occur.)

This lack of deterrence is hardly surprising. The creation of the ICTY was the first attempt at international justice since the prosecutions before the International Military Tribunals at Nuremberg and Tokyo. Initially, it was very unclear that the ICTY would become a functioning tribunal. For a period of time, it was trying only one low-level perpetrator (Duško Tadić); thus, in those early years, it was quite uncertain that it would go on to prosecute higher-level perpetrators. It is perhaps then no wonder there was no (or little) deterrence in the initial years. One study does, however, show that later in the life of the tribunal, its existence was able to create deterrence regarding Macedonia;<sup>36</sup> thus, there arguably was a modest contribution to deterrence.

Deterrence depends on many factors. As criminal tribunals and domestic courts pursue more atrocity crimes prosecutions, ideally there will become more deterrence. Yet, deterrence is dependent on many

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<sup>36</sup> J.R. McAllister, “Deterring Wartime Atrocities: Hard Lessons from the Yugoslav Tribunal,” 44(3) *International Security* 84 (2020), at [https://www.mitpressjournals.org/doi/abs/10.1162/isec\\_a\\_00370](https://www.mitpressjournals.org/doi/abs/10.1162/isec_a_00370).

factors such as whether there is a tribunal with jurisdiction and/or the likelihood of domestic criminal prosecutions either within the country where the crimes occurred or abroad. Other factors include how likely it is that the crime will be detected and the identity of the perpetrator(s) uncovered. To date, unfortunately, many factors work against the creation of deterrence. Some tribunals prosecute relatively few individuals; thus, a would-be perpetrator might reasonably calculate his or her chances of being one of those indicted to be relatively low. In other situations, there is no jurisdiction for prosecutions at the international level (for example, before the ICC or another international or hybrid tribunal) and yet there is also no domestic political “will” for prosecutions in the country where the crimes occurred (true, for example, as to the crimes committed in Syria and Myanmar).<sup>37</sup> Some countries, such as the United States recently under the Trump Administration have even acted to undermine international criminal prosecutions by threatening asset freezes and travel bans against ICC staff if they pursue cases against U.S. nationals.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Some modest prospects for prosecutions may be possible vis-à-vis crimes committed in both countries through universal jurisdiction or prosecutions in domestic courts abroad under other jurisdictional theories. The ICC also has jurisdiction over crimes committed in Myanmar if one element of the crime also occurred within the territory of Bangladesh (a State Party to the ICC’s Rome Statute); thus, some ICC prosecutions are possible.

<sup>38</sup> Executive Order on Blocking Property of Certain Persons Associated with the International Criminal Court, 11 June 11 2020, at <https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/executive-order-blocking-property-certain-persons-associated-international-criminal-court/>. Hopefully, the US will reverse the Executive Order and its policy under a new Administration.

### *Reconciliation*

In terms of reconciliation, few would claim that the ICTY has achieved this; it is generally acknowledged there is no reconciliation in the region as a whole, although there might be some at the individual level. Yet, arguably, “reconciliation” is not an appropriate benchmark by which to evaluate the ICTY’s legacy or that of any tribunal.

“Reconciliation” is complicated. In academic literature, there is no agreement: (1) on what reconciliation is (there is no agreed definition); (2) whether it is a process (being reconciled) or the end-state that matters (achieving reconciliation); or (3) whether reconciliation is something that can be mandated by the state (“top down”) or must be created at the grassroots or interpersonal level (“bottom up”) or whether it must be simultaneously both “top down” and “bottom up.”<sup>39</sup> Others argue that because reconciliation has connotations of forgiveness (“forgive thy killer”), it should not even be a goal and one should instead replace it with the goal of achieving peaceful coexistence of formerly antagonistic groups. It is often observed that for victims to witness trials in the short term may exacerbate tensions; there is nothing to suggest that witnessing a trial or seeing a guilty verdict renders former perpetrators and their victims “reconciled.”

Yet, arguably, trials set a key foundation upon which later reconciliation may be built. The building, however, must arguably be accomplished by grassroots actors (NGOs on the ground) such as Post-Conflict Research Center in Sarajevo and Youth Initiative for Human

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<sup>39</sup> See, e.g., David Bloomfield, “On Good Terms: Clarifying Reconciliation” (Berghof Report No. 14, October 2006).

Rights, as well as, previously, the Outreach work of the ICTY's Sarajevo office. Reconciliation appears to be a very slow interpersonal process of trust-building and seeing the humanity of the "other." Yet, this may only ultimately succeed (beyond individual isolated cases) when political leadership is conducive to such reconciliation ("top down" reconciliation may also be accomplished or at least "bottom up" reconciliation not thwarted). Reconciliation may also require that many of the still outstanding war crimes cases in the region be pursued and that victims receive reparations for the crimes committed.

Accordingly, it was arguably a mistake to suggest the ICTY would achieve reconciliation. What the ICTY has done through its judgments and convictions is set the foundation upon which later reconciliation may be built – if, when, and to the extent that, the political situation is more conducive to it.

*Creating a single, shared narrative  
of facts and silencing denial of crimes*

Another area where one does not see significant success is if there was any expectation that the ICTY's work would result in a single shared narrative of what occurred during the wars and silence denial of crimes.

If one expected the ICTY would determine "the truth" regarding crimes and the war, what one sees instead in the region are different groups having often dramatically different narratives. As noted in surveys compiled by Marko Milanović<sup>40</sup> and conducted by the Belgrade Center for Human Rights ("BCHR")

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<sup>40</sup> See Milanović, *supra* note 32.

and the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (“OSCE”) denial of crimes (not only those at Srebrenica but elsewhere), exists, as well as partial denial – for example, admitting that crimes occurred at Srebrenica but maintaining, despite the ICTY’s rulings,<sup>41</sup> that they were not genocide. Such denial has been furthered at the international level when the Russian Federation vetoed at the UN Security Council a resolution that would have commemorated the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Srebrenica massacre as genocide.<sup>42</sup>

The way that memorialization is used very selectively in the region also helps to slant narratives and fuel denial. For example, in Republika Srpska, one sees near a major atrocity sites – the Kravitza warehouse outside Srebrenica – a memorial to a relatively small number of Serb victims, ignoring the site of the large-scale massacre of Bosnian Muslims committed nearly across the street. A similar problem exists with the lack of memorialization, for example, at the sites of the former “camps” in Prijedor.

The shaping of narratives, however, is arguably at least partly attributable to nationalistic leadership that has not managed to articulate a more positive message that would move beyond these slanted narratives. At the end of the day, the ICTY was only a court, and despite its Outreach Office trying to reach the public in the region and convey the findings in the ICTY’s judgments, there was only so much that outreach could achieve.

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<sup>41</sup> See, e.g., *Prosecutor v Krstić* (Trial Chamber Judgment) Case No. IT-98-33 (2 August 2001); *Prosecutor v Krstić* (Appeals Chamber Judgment) Case No. IT-98-33-A (19 April 2004).

<sup>42</sup> Draft Res. S/2015/508 (8 July 2015), at [http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view\\_doc.asp?symbol=S/2015/508](http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/2015/508) (sponsored by Jordan, Lithuania, Malaysia, New Zealand, the UK, and the US).

A single-shared narrative will need to be accomplished, if ever, through a regional truth commission, such as the proposed RECOM<sup>43</sup> and/or through a new generation of political leaders. It may also take a new generation of leadership for RECOM to be implemented.

Thus, as to creating a single shared narrative in the region and silencing denial, these were probably never reasonable expectations for a tribunal. The ICTY, however, has undoubtedly contributed, through its judgments and archives, in minimizing denial and providing important resources for those working to minimize denial.

### Lessons Learned

The experience of the ICTY yields a few significant lessons. First, as mentioned above, quite obviously, tribunals are no substitute to preventing the crimes in the first place. The international community and individual states who are States Parties should pay *far more* attention to the legal requirement mandated by Article 1 of the Genocide Convention to “prevent” genocide, an obligation given content by the International Court of Justice in the *Bosnia v. Serbia* case<sup>44</sup> and more

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<sup>43</sup> RECOM stands for the Regional Commission Tasked with Establishing the Facts about All Victims of War Crimes and Other Serious Human Rights Violations Committed on the Territory of the Former Yugoslavia from 1 January 1991 to 31 December 2001.

<sup>44</sup> Case Concerning Application of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (Bosn. & Herz. v. Serb. and Montenegro), Judgment, 2007 I.C.J. Rep. 43 (February 26). The holding disappointingly did not find Serbia responsible for genocide or responsible for aiding genocide but only for failing to “prevent” genocide.

recently in its provisional measures order in *Gambia et al. v. Myanmar*.<sup>45</sup> This obligation must be enforced so that there are no more Srebrenicas.<sup>46</sup>

Second, as to the ICTY's prosecutions and what they were intended to accomplish and what it was reasonable to think they would accomplish, it has become conventional wisdom that it is key to set reasonable expectations for tribunals. Overly ambitious expectations can lead to disappointment that could have been avoided had more appropriate goals been communicated. This is, and will be, true for all tribunals and probably local war crimes prosecutions as well.

Third, the ICTY was able to achieve a considerable amount if one examines benchmarks such as those related to delivering justice: the prosecution of high-level perpetrators pursuant to internationally recognized fair trial standards; the creation of an extensive body of generally well-reasoned jurisprudence; its focus on previously under-reported and under-documented crimes such as crimes of SGBV; its ability to have nearly 5,000 victims and witnesses testify; its creation of a solid historical record and extensive documentary archive; and its contribution to the rule of law through its own work, capacity-building in the region, and more globally.

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<sup>45</sup> Application of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (*Gam. v. Myan.*), Provisional Measures Order (Int'l Ct. of Just., 23 January 2020).

<sup>46</sup> I discuss the obligation to "prevent" genocide in depth in my book, J. Trahan, *Existing Legal Limits to Security Council Veto Power in the Face of Atrocity Crimes* (Cambridge University Press 2020) both as a source of "hard law" underlying the "responsibility to protect" ("R2P"), and as grounds why certain vetoes should be considered of questionable legality if cast while there is ongoing genocide or it is at serious risk.

Fourth, the ICTY was able to make some modest contributions when evaluating socially-transformative goals, but was certainly not able to transform the political landscape in the former Yugoslavia. At the end of the day, tribunals are simply courts and cannot achieve social-transformation by themselves. Thus, the ICTY was not able to change narratives in the region, silence denial of crimes, nor achieve reconciliation – nor should tribunals be asked to accomplish such goals. Yet, it was able to create important foundations through its prosecutions, judgments, and evidentiary archive that is assisting, and may in the future further assist, other actors in the region working towards limiting denial of crimes and potentially bringing about reconciliation or at least a more harmonious coexistence.

### **Reflections for the Future**

A final area that warrants reflection is what enabled the ICTY to achieve what it did and whether current or future tribunals are similarly positioned to be able to replicate its accomplishments. Unfortunately, the prognosis is hardly encouraging.

The ICTY's achievements rested on a solid foundation of political support stemming from its creation by the UN Security Council and its (considerable) funding through the UN's assessed budget. That political support was one of the reasons all the ICTY's indictees in its main cases were able to be apprehended. The size of the ICTY's budget also enabled it to conduct the number of trials that it did.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> The ICTY indicted 161 individuals, a significant number of whom faced prosecution at the ICTY. See ICTY "Infographic," *supra* note 14.

Unfortunately, the political climate is now far less conducive to international justice than when the ICTY and ICTR were created, with impediments particularly in the political arena and somewhat in the financial arena. The Security Council has not created any *ad hoc* tribunals like the ICTY and ICTR since they were created and there is little expectation that there will be similar tribunals<sup>48</sup> unless or until there are significant political shifts in Security Council voting. Conventional wisdom was also that the *ad hoc* tribunals were too expensive and thereafter the international community shifted its focus to creating the (far less well-funded) hybrid tribunals, which relied on states to make voluntary contributions to fund them; unsurprisingly, with less funding, tribunals such as the Special Court for Sierra Leone and ECCC were able to prosecute far fewer perpetrators than the ICTY.<sup>49</sup> The creation of the ICC also ushered in the (probably unreasonable) expectation that there would be no need for additional tribunals. Yet, nearly twenty years into its existence, the ICC – without the kind of political support received by the *ad hoc* tribunals – has not been able to conduct that many trials, has suffered from politically-motivated attacks,<sup>50</sup> and is limited in the number of investigations and prosecutions it may pursue due to budgetary constraints.

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<sup>48</sup> The Security Council did create The Special Tribunal for Lebanon but it has a very narrow mandate in terms of the crimes it is prosecuting.

<sup>49</sup> The Special Court tried ten individuals and the ECCC, as mentioned, has tried three. The Government of Cambodia has thwarted the ECCC's work, blocking what would be its third and fourth trials involving additional accused.

<sup>50</sup> See Executive Order, *supra* note 38. Past attempts to undermine the ICC have also come from Kenya and the African Union, at Kenya's behest, when the ICC was attempting to prosecute Kenya's President and Deputy President for election-related violence in Kenya.

In the face of political hostility, the international community has recently looked to more modest means to advance justice or at least be in a position to advance justice should that possibility arise. The modest steps taken – creating mechanisms to collect and collate information – also conveniently negate the perception of doing nothing in the face of atrocity crimes. One such mechanism is the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism (“IIIM”)<sup>51</sup> created by the UN General Assembly to compile evidence of atrocity crimes committed in Syria.<sup>52</sup> The IIIM’s evidence is feeding into isolated prosecutions in domestic courts in Europe of Syrian perpetrators who have fled there.<sup>53</sup> Creation of the IIIM was pursued after the draft resolution referring the crimes in Syria to the ICC was vetoed.<sup>54</sup> While evidence collection is critically important, the IIIM has no capacity to conduct prosecutions and is thus hardly a substitute for the creation of a tribunal or referral to the ICC – both of which could have created jurisdiction over all the crimes in Syria. Yet, creation of the IIIM was all that was politically feasible.

A similar evidence-collection mechanism, the United Nations Independent Investigative Mechanism for

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<sup>51</sup> The mechanism’s full name is “The International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism to Assist in the Investigation and Prosecution of Those Responsible for the Most Serious Crimes under International Law Committed in the Syrian Arab Republic Since March 2011.”

<sup>52</sup> G.A. Res. A/71/L.48 (2016).

<sup>53</sup> Remarks of Catherine Marchi-Uhel, Annual Meeting of the American Society of International Law, 25–26 June 2020 (citing IIIM cooperation with the authorities in a number of European countries).

<sup>54</sup> S.C. Res. 348 (2014) (vetoed by the Russian Federation and China).

Myanmar (“IIMM”), was created by the Human Rights Council to investigate and compile evidence of crimes committed in Myanmar.<sup>55</sup> A third mechanism recently created by the UN Security Council, the United Nations Investigative Team to Promote Accountability for Crimes Committed by Da’esh/ISIL (“UNITAD”), is collecting evidence of atrocity crimes committed in Iraq by the so-called “Islamic State” (Da’esh).<sup>56</sup> (Politics were also at play here because there was only agreement to investigate crimes by one side in the conflict, those of Da’esh/ISIL, but no agreement to investigate crimes by all sides.)<sup>57</sup> These latter two mechanisms similarly have no ability to conduct prosecutions, but, like the IIMM, are anticipated to supply evidence to domestic courts or other tribunals to the extent feasible.

Overall, the creation of these three mechanisms is extremely troubling in that it suggests the international community has shifted its focus away from the creation of tribunals to the creation of mechanisms that only investigate and compile evidence of atrocity crimes. That is a tragically weak response to atrocity crimes and no doubt provides slim solace to the victims.

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<sup>55</sup> Human Rights Council, U.N. Doc. A/HRC/39/L.22, para. 22 (25 September 2018).

<sup>56</sup> S/RES/2379 (21 September 2017).

<sup>57</sup> This aspect of UNITAD (its one-sided mandate) and that UNITAD could potentially provide such evidence to another side in the conflict, the Iraqi Government, is somewhat akin to “victor’s justice.” UNITAD is additionally problematic in that the Iraqi Government has been conducting brief trials of ISIL perpetrators lacking in due process which end in the death penalty. It would be problematic for UNITAD to provide its evidence for use in such trials, yet that appears to be envisioned in its founding documents. Due to these troubling aspects in its design, UNITAD is thus substantially different from the other two mechanisms.

## Conclusion

The experience of the ICTY illustrates that the international community needs to set reasonable expectations for what it expects tribunals to achieve. Tribunals are not a panacea for everything that ails a country in transition from a period of mass atrocities. They are primarily courts and they primarily dispense justice – justice that is crucially important in order not to have recurring cycles of violence. The international community should not look to tribunals to accomplish broader socially-transformative goals, although by performing their work, tribunals may be able to contribute to such goals. Such transformation largely must be accomplished by other actors such as local civil society, through additional transitional justice measures, and hopefully new, and more enlightened, generations of political leaders. Yet, without the important work of the ICTY, those in the region would have a far more difficult time trying to move towards those objectives. What the ICTY was able to accomplish should serve as a reminder to the international community of what is possible when there is the political “will,” something that unfortunately often appears to be lacking in the currently challenging political climate.

# Muslims, Genocide, and Healing?

MEHNAZ M. AFRIDI\*

*...We in Sarajevo have nobody to talk, just each other, nobody wants to listen to these stories. I cannot talk more. You talk now. I am waiting for your letter...*

Alexsander Hemon

*Feeling and expressing accountability for all of this violent history makes our histories more balanced and complete and our societies more just. Memory solidarity is politically difficult.*<sup>1</sup>

Jelena Subotic

IF “MEMORY SOLIDARITY is politically difficult?” how then do we heal? As victims give testimony, bodies are still found and graves are dug we are still witnessing the denial of the Genocide. We have witnessed this denial slowly from 2004 to 2018 to the present. On the 25th anniversary of the Srebrenica massacre, revisionist rhetoric about war crimes in Bosnia has spread exponentially.

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Witnessing and speaking out is what we can do with the 25<sup>th</sup> commemoration of Srebrenica, the only mass killing in Balkan wars that was officially ruled as genocide by the international courts. This was an atrocity that was the final act in a much broader genocidal strategy – it was at first coined as an “ethnic cleansing”. The Srebrenica genocide was the planned, systematic, and industrialized conclusion of a four-year campaign of forced deportation, torture, mass murder and systematic sexual violence by Bosnian Serb forces in service of their goal to create a “Greater Serbia”. Some Bosnian Serb historians and politicians continue to deny that genocide and ethnic cleansing took place. Here, both literally and figuratively, ethnic cleansing bleeds into genocide, as mass murder is committed in order to rid the land of a people. This is clearly the case of Srebrenica. The denial of the Bosnian Genocide has led to more suffering and political tension. The nationalism, and racism that has crept up all over the world in words of denial and repression of minorities, it is more than ever important that we remember the victims.

But, today I want us to remember as we must also try to heal and listen to the buried voices that were present as victims and absent as Bosnians during the siege. We must take account of the collective memory of not all Bosnians but Muslims as well as they experienced their identities torn and their people murdered. As a Muslim living in the US, I recall hearing about the Bosnian genocide from afar and from a close colleague, Ales Debeljak, a renowned Slovenian poet. He was intense and sorrowful but no one wanted to believe his accounts and wanted to take seriously the war that had ensued in his country. Essentially, no one

cared and he was frustrated and was cajoling people to the point where he was seen as being angry. Yet, he was the Moshe the Beadle in Elie Wiesel's book, *Night* who warns the town of the atrocities and the Jews are in complete denial.

Remembering is one thing but we must accept and acknowledge the truth and that's vital-- but healing is the way forward in mending the fractures with others as we move into new nation building and maintaining relations with our neighbors if possible. After looking for ways of how we can remember, I thought of Bosnian narratives and literature that embody the rawness of experiences that are then shelved into history books. This body of literature brought me to loss, melancholia, Nostalgia and healing. There is something sad, and melancholic, perhaps something that has been lost forever, what do we mourn for? When will we long for healing? Am I referring to the memorializing of something that has been lost forever, we sustain the grand memories of the chief Muslim civil and religious ruler, regarded as the successor of Muhammad. The caliph who ruled in Baghdad until 1258 and then in Egypt until the Ottoman conquest of 1517; the title was then held by the Ottoman sultans until Bosnia-Herzegovina annexed to Austria-Hungary, a Bosnian Serb student, Gavrilo Princip, assassinates the Austrian archduke Franz Ferdinand in Sarajevo. This precipitates World War I and Austria-Hungary collapses at the end of the war. Bosnia-Herzegovina becomes part of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes. I bring into play this short memory of Muslim/Bosnian history to show the dramatic and rapid changes that led to the Bosnian Genocide. The loss of the power of leadership, transformations of human psyche and the development

of a core religious identity is perhaps the core wound that we all face today. What do Bosnian Muslims say, or scream at when their lives are lost, families destroyed, children killed and men and women murdered? Do they have a place of considerate catharsis and how can we rehabilitate this deep wound from a place of powerful and happy memories all the way to loss?

Bosnian literature and first accounts have battled and challenged the memories of trauma, a wound that they cannot heal because of the cycle of violence and denial. A few questions that I ask: If their stories are denied, doesn't that perpetuate another cycle of violence? Repression of the victim and the denial of their suffering is the most hateful act in human history.

In "Nowhere Man" by Aleksander Hemon, he describes the unsettling feeling of witnessing a war by being absent through his main character, Pronek. This is an important novel that includes voices that suffered outside of Bosnia whether they were Bosnian or Muslims. Muslims watched the genocide from afar in shock and felt the collective pain of their brothers and sisters. Hemon writes:

"After a letter from Pronek's friend Mirza, on grim stretcher duty in Bosnia in 1995, Pronek's tale unfolds almost through his own eyes, with an unnamed narrator as intimate as a reflection – Pronek "oblivious to me as a wall is oblivious to a shadow dancing on it". Haunted by headlines of "Thousands killed in Srebrenica", Pronek piles on weight and has visions of a massacre triggered by the sound of a staple gun next door. While he hates the standard question about whether he is Muslim ("I am complicated"), he explains: "Some Serbs try to kill the Muslims in Sarajevo and Bosnia, and also the people who don't want to kill the Muslims."

The novel brings up issues of home, identity and time. Most importantly, the reader is caught in the depths of a victim who can be inside and outside of the war that is occurring in his own homeland. What is the wound that creates this from the perspective of the victim and in Hemon's novel it can be said that as one author has argued that the psychoanalytical rhetoric raised the element of madness and complexes of both Serbians and Croats? The question remains, however, how can the Bosnians perpetuate their victimhood at the hands of the Serbs, when they are also seeking to incorporate a substantial Serbian population. In Hemon's novel we experience a complexity when he writes:

"Serbs are mad people...but Croats suffer from a castration complex." Avowed Serb Psychiatrist Dr. Jovan Raskovic to Franjo Tudjman, the president of Croatia, on the occasion of a meeting in 1990 to resolve the growing tension between the Croatian government and the Serb minority in Croatia. He responded to what he saw as a need for psychiatric supervision in a political situation that was spiraling out of control, he ostensibly wanted to achieve a rapprochement between two ethnic groups---mad Serbs and complexed Croats. Here we see a complex web of recuperation, memory and displacement of the truth of those who intentionally were killers. Perhaps, one should look at the slow but truthful moral response of Germany post-Holocaust, the acceptance of the Holocaust and the trauma and memory that goes with what Germans had to face. Facing the truth from within the perpetrators leads to the healing as literature expresses that even if you are absent in war, there is a collective feeling of responsibility. For example, Hemon is a Bosnian author and but an onlooker during the war, he becomes

a kind of delirium as he struggles with his identity and memories of both Sarajevo and his childhood, he has a section in his novel entitled "Sarajevo, September 10, 1967-January 24, 1992 as he was marking a month before the siege that ensues for 4 years," he notes that his favorite place to hang out is "Nostaljia" a marking that explains the nostalgia but the memory of his home is marked with scenes like the following as abandonment and emptiness.

"So, here we are at the Sarajevo airport, January 22 1992. Pronek's father drops him off without entering the airport, because there is no parking...Then he is on the plane, buckling up, looking warily at the mountains encircling the airport. The seat next to him is empty. The plane goes up, his stomach goes down, and he is careful not to show that he is afraid to die. He looks down and can see a line of dots trickling out of the airport building toward another plane... The plane penetrates the clouds and Pronek can see nothing. By the time the plane exits the dark wool of clouds and enters the bright starless sky, he already cannot remember what happened yesterday." (71-2). The play on memory, forgetting and then the repression of the war plaques the novel and his main character, once dropped off to be saved yet he cannot imagine not being saved in the war.

Men were murdered and women were murdered and raped. The lost and most neglected narratives during genocide are the ones of women who have been ravaged and raped by war. Their bodies stymied by the enemy and used for war as a weapon. How do women heal? Tell their story?

Rape is the desire to feel powerful, to vent aggression, fear and despair by crushing a physically weaker

adversary, to destroy and degrade. In July 1995, after Bosnian Serb forces overran Srebrenica, 18-year-old 'H.T.' was raped at a battery factory in nearby Potocari. It was 40 days she had given birth, and she was still bleeding. Her rapist knocked her unconscious before sexually assaulting her.

She fled Srebrenica after managing to survive the Serb shelling. Her husband told her to go to the UN peacekeepers' base in Potocari, while he tried to escape through the woods to territory controlled by the Bosnian Army with his brother, father and father-in-law. Later she found out that they were all killed.

"Feminist scholarship has two interrelated goals: to give women a voice long denied them and to offer a perspective long denied us."<sup>1</sup> The denial of their perspective lies in the very shame that female survivors of the Bosnian genocide recalling the shame of the naked body paraded in front of men and women, the blood and the lack of hygiene. These aspects are not to be spoken and create not only what we know as trauma psychologically but an inner shame that lies deep within us. The "coming out" as a woman who has been assaulted, abused and even raped during the Genocide was not enough a trauma then the whole experience of the murder and mayhem of the whole community.

In *S: A Novel about the Balkans*, based on real facts and interviews that Slavenka Drakulic conducted with Bosnian women after 1992 demonstrates the many issues that intersect woman's lives regardless of race,

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<sup>1</sup> Elissa Bemporad & Joyce W. Warren, *Women and Genocide: Survivors, Victims and Perpetrators*, Marion Kaplan, "Gender: A Crucial tool in Holocaust Research," (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2018), p. 106.

status and religion in the face of genocide. She writes a novel naming the main character S who has an affair with the captain of the camp, a man she despises but gives up her body to so that she is spared the continual rape by the Serbian soldiers, she sees him as a way to escape camp but yet feels that “The only thing I learned in the camp was about forgetting.”<sup>2</sup>

The forgetting is a kind of remembering. As H.T. narrates that she remembers seeing bodies near the road to Potocari – a child, a woman and a man, hit by grenades. She saw an elderly woman whose chin had been cut off by a shell. “I took a nappy from my baby to put her chin back, since it was all ripped to pieces,” she recalled.

Once she reached the battery factory, she saw people fainting because of the heat and because there was no drinking water. “I saw a bucket near the road, from humanitarian aid. I saw dry cookies, but they were all green. I wiped the green stuff off the cookies and gave them to my son to eat,” she said.

During the night, H.T. recalls hearing the screams of women and children. In the morning, the children are crying again and there is no water to drink.

“I went through the field to the stream, but I saw bodies of men so I couldn’t get water, since I was too afraid. I returned to the factory,” she recalled.

“I could no longer cope with the problem. It was a burden inside me, under my skin, in my core, in my bones. I felt I would burst and my brain wasn’t functioning. I could no longer talk, I was suffocating, I was afraid and I couldn’t breathe, so I had to talk to someone,” she said.

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<sup>2</sup> Slavenka Drakulic, *S: A Novel about the Balkans*, trans. Marko Ivic. (New York: Penguin, 1999), p. 104.

But she believes that she may never really recover.

“It is a pain, a stain that will stay with me until I am dead,” she said.

The pain and healing cannot be buried by Genocide deniers and those who relativize Genocide, this in itself creates a cycle of violence and a deep vacuum.

Denial of these stories call for a moral and collective conscience that can adhere to truth for the reality of pain, repression and memory of these events. If we do not confront the deniers, it will be a catastrophe. “There was a sense of catastrophe – physical and material. Germany was destroyed. Partitioned. And then there was this moral catastrophe. German society had to face and recognize what had just happened. But this rather quickly subsided and people had to deal with their daily lives. So, this trauma and feeling of guilt was suppressed.” What people see today as Germany’s success in coping with its past really started in the late 1950s and took hold in the 1960s, he says. The catalytic event was the Frankfurt Auschwitz trials that took place from 1963 to 1965. These were the first major Nazi war crime cases pursued not by the victorious Allies but by the Germans. People who had served at the concentration camp were brought to justice. But even then, many Germans cast blame on the destroyed Third Reich, as if that were somehow separate from Germany.”<sup>3</sup>

So, I ask how are Muslims going to heal post-genocide? Do we want to share these memories of those who were present and absent? A sharing of loss and pain that is caught once again in the cycle of violence of memory. Whose memory and whose healing?

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<sup>3</sup> <https://hub.jhu.edu/magazine/2015/summer/germany-japan-reconciliation/>

Hemon's novel is a recapturing of a lost past and new future with a complex understanding of identity and loss, and HT recalls the horror so that she can move to a place of perhaps healing even though she cannot forget the images, memories and violence. These narratives call out for a kind of remembering that is intimate and real which may offer a path to acceptance and healing, we must allow and work on if we want to turn the tables of violence. The denial of the pain of others is the denial of their humanity and we are caught in a sad cycle of violence and if we are not careful, we will see more violence and murder.

I leave you with a short poem from my friend Ales Dbeljak Without Anesthesia, he passed away in 2016 at the age of 54.

*Naked, alone and heartless  
I stand. There is no center of the world.  
My weeping cleanses nothing,  
my body isn't my property,  
salt irritates the skin.*<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> [https://blackbird.vcu.edu/v9n2/poetry/henry\\_b/without\\_page.shtml](https://blackbird.vcu.edu/v9n2/poetry/henry_b/without_page.shtml)

# A Shared Desire: Regional Efforts to Prevent Genocide

GABRIELA GHINDEA \*

A QUARTER OF A CENTURY after the unfolding of genocide and other mass atrocities in Bosnia-Herzegovina has passed. But at a different pace in Southeastern Europe. For the genocide survivors and all families, torn apart by the tragic loss of their dear ones, the time had a different quality than for the rest of us. My thoughts and heart go out to them, and I hope that after many years of uncertainty, an assiduous quest for truth and justice, despair, and immense grief, their acute pain could be perhaps to some extent alleviated by some answers. However, we must never forget that their every-day reality will always be marked by the suffering produced by atrocities such as the massacre from Srebrenica, commemorated these days. Genocide survivors and their families remain, over the years, an essential guiding and moral authority in the process of rebuilding a more inclusive and peaceful society in Bosnia-Herzegovina.

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For the rest of us, witnesses to a genocide in the middle of Europe, Srebrenica is a powerful memento of the fact that peace is a privilege. It should never be taken for granted, and prevention work should be a constant matter of conscience, involving the whole of society, not only governmental actors or other policy-makers. Srebrenica proved, once again, the misconception that genocides are singular events, confined to the past and remote countries, and put into practice exclusively by monsters, who could never be part of our culture and community. Unfortunately, the genocide in Bosnia confronted us with the unsettling truth that there were several stages and recognizable risks along the way that could have been observed and prevented before the atrocities unfolded. It also taught us that anyone could become a victim or a perpetrator in a mass atrocity.

That being said, how can these harsh lessons from the past be utilized in the present to ensure that history will no longer repeat itself? I would say, by acknowledging and having faith in the immense potential of the Region. It is true that Southeastern Europe is a complex, heterogeneous space, marked by overlapping conflicts and tragedies, with different root-causes and outcomes. Some of the wounds in the collective memory have never healed and the willingness to address a difficult past varies throughout the Region. Nevertheless, Southeastern Europe also has a long history of dealing successfully with ethnic and religious diversity. Despite many challenges, there is still an uninterrupted opportunity for dialogue on vital topics. From the discussions with our partners throughout the Region, many of whom have participated in the educational programs of the Auschwitz Institute

for the Prevention of Genocide and Mass Atrocities, we understood clearly that there is a shared desire to prioritize atrocity crimes prevention policy development and training within each country and throughout the Region as a whole. In an age of revisionism, populism, hate speech, identity-based violence, and revival of concerning narratives, these are, no doubt, encouraging signs.

The Auschwitz Institute expanded, therefore, in the last years its programs in Europe creating the Department for Mediterranean Basin Programs and opening a new office in Bucharest. In this framework, we supported the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Public Ministry from Romania in establishing the National Network for Genocide Prevention and Multidisciplinary Research of Mass Graves. We have developed for our governmental partners customized training programs on atrocity prevention. In all our national and regional seminars on atrocity prevention, we invited instructors and speakers from Bosnia and Herzegovina – war survivors, academics, law practitioners, and forensic experts. They shared best practices from their rich expertise in the field of mass graves and transitional justice.

The experience of the last years in the Region proved that many lessons could be learned from the neighboring countries, and synergies can be created in the endeavor of combating the concerning phenomena I mentioned before. Last year, we successfully coordinated a regional initiative designed to spur the development of more inclusive policies that enable vulnerable groups, especially Roma communities, to be more politically and socially involved in the society, reducing thus the risk of atrocity crimes targeting

them. All these encouraging signs led the Romanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs to support, in partnership with the Auschwitz Institute and the Stanley Center for Peace and Security, the establishment of an emerging regional Network for Atrocity Crimes Prevention in the Mediterranean Basin. The Network will assist regional policymakers in building capacity and developing policies in the field of atrocity crimes prevention, including war crimes, crimes against humanity, and genocide, drawing on best practices from other regions and taking into account specific local expertise.

Finally, I would like to emphasize that while education is the key to advancing prevention, it should not be confined to a classroom. It should seek creative avenues instead of fulfilling its goals. We learned from the lessons of our programs organized at Auschwitz that the power of place combined with the power of storytelling can reach not only policymakers and experts, but also the wider public, transforming it from an uninvolved mass of bystanders into potential agents of change in their communities. During the Biennale in Venice, the Auschwitz Institute organized the ARTIVISM – Atrocity Prevention Pavilion. In this project, we combined our experience in dealing with atrocity prevention with the personal experiences of six artists and groups of artists in dealing with mass atrocities in their incredible art. We created a space for dialogue and education, with the underlying message that everyone has a role to play and can act as an agent of change. In this context, I had the privilege to learn more about the work of Aida Šehović and to support with my colleagues, the 2019 iteration of the nomadic monument ŠTO TE NEMA. Being a small part of the ritual on the 11<sup>th</sup> of July, I was profoundly

moved by the atmosphere created in a Venetian garden. The abstract number of over 8.000 victims was transformed at the sight of the small fildžani with untouched coffee into a gallery of personal stories of individuals, with dreams, hopes, plans, abruptly interrupted by war and mass murder. More than ever, after this event, I think that we owe to all these unfulfilled potentials, to tell their story, and to make prevention work an individual moral responsibility.

# The Balkan Roots of the Far Right’s “Great Replacement” Theory

JASMIN MUJANOVIĆ\*

WHEN RATKO MLADIĆ’S Serb nationalist forces entered the Srebrenica enclave in eastern Bosnia and Herzegovina on July 11, 1995, the general of the self-styled “Army of the *Republika Srpska*” took a moment to speak to an accompanying camera crew.<sup>1</sup>

“Here we are,” he says solemnly, “on July 11, 1995, in Serbian Srebrenica.” What followed was Mladić’s rationale for the extermination campaign that was unfolding in the city, the culmination of the nearly four-year-long Bosnian Genocide orchestrated by Mladić and his political masters, Slobodan Milošević and Radovan Karadžić: “We gift this town to the Serb people. Finally, the moment has come, after the uprising against the *Dahijas*, for us to take revenge against the Turks in this region.”

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Even those who had followed the news of the Bosnian War but were unfamiliar with Serb nationalist lexicon would have struggled to make sense of Mladić's pronouncements. But this was the clearly articulated thesis of the Belgrade-orchestrated war and genocide in Bosnia, and it is a sentiment that has continued to percolate through to the present – not just in the Balkans but, increasingly, throughout the West.

The essence of Mladić's project is known to the contemporary, Western far right as the "Great Replacement" theory: the idea that Muslims are waging demographic warfare against white, Christian Europeans, seeking to outbreed and replace them and their civilization. And defending "Western civilization," as such, requires a confrontation with the "invaders." Or as the Canadian reactionary Mark Steyn put it in a 2006 New York Times bestseller:

"In a democratic age, you can't buck demography – except through civil war. The Serbs figured that out, as other Continentals will in the years ahead: If you cannot outbreed the enemy, cull 'em. The problem that Europe faces is that Bosnia's demographic profile is now the model for the entire continent."

Though Mladić and his associates did not use the term Great Replacement (it was only coined by the French neo-fascist writer Renaud Camus in 2010), their paranoid, genocidal campaign against the Bosniak community in Bosnia (and later ethnic Albanians in Kosovo) and the accompanying narratives justifying these pogroms electrified far-right extremists in the West. In a sense, Mladić and his cohort were the true authors of the Great Replacement doctrine – and all its accompanying bloodletting.

Today, the Bosnian Genocide is a rhetorical and conceptual pillar of the Western far right, an example of the kinds of regimes and policies they embrace and aspire to replicate. In untangling the origins of this coupling, a still more disturbing reality emerges: Bosnia's recent past – the dissolution of Yugoslavia, the ensuing war, and the accompanying genocide – is what many contemporaries on the Western radical right imagine, and aspire to reenact, in their own societies.

Mladić's oratory in Srebrenica referenced the events of the First Serbian Uprising (1804-1813), during which the leaders of the incipient Serbian state sought to overthrow the *Dahijas* – the largely autonomous, Ottoman-backed military regime that governed the then Sanjak of Smederevo. In the canon of Serbian nationalist thought, the struggle against the *Dahijas* (a South Slavic transfiguration of the Ottoman Turkish word *dayı*) signified the rebirth of the Serbian nation, whose statehood and autonomy, they argued, had been extinguished by the 15th century conquest of South-eastern Europe by the Ottomans.

This is a Christian parable of the (re)birth of a nation. And as in D.W. Griffith's "The Birth of a Nation," the central conceit is the eternal struggle between a noble warrior race and a savage, racialized Other. In the standard telling of the former, the 1389 Battle of Kosovo – a bloody but indecisive clash between the invading Ottomans and a coalition of Serbian, Bosnian, Croatian, and Albanian lords – marked the metaphorical death of the medieval Serbian state. Prince Lazar, who led the Serbian forces, and the knight Milos Obilic, who in the oral tradition is said to have killed Murad I on the battlefield but may in reality be a mythic figure invented after the fact, subsequently assumed

Christ-like characters. They became folk heroes who sacrificed themselves to preserve the Serbian people and their state in the Kingdom of Heaven, even as it was conquered on Earth.

The prophecy of the second coming of the Serbian polity was then fulfilled in the 19th century as the Ottoman hold on the Balkans slipped, and a modern Serbian state emerged and quickly began vying for political and military supremacy in the region. But left unaddressed for both 19th and 20th century Serbian nationalists was the lingering problem of “the Turks,” that is, the indigenous Muslim populations of the Balkans – primarily the Bosniaks of Bosnia and the Albanians of Kosovo (often referred in the discourses of the era as *Arnauti*, another Ottoman era term for region’s ethnic Albanians).

In the century between the First Serbian Uprising and the start of World War I, a de facto (if not always systemic) method took root to address this problem: Local Muslim populations, whether Slavic, Albanian, or Turkish, were to be expelled and/or exterminated wherever the new Serbian authorities managed to establish even a momentary political claim. The process was emulated by the new Greek, Bulgarian, and Romanian authorities as well. The exact figures are disputed or otherwise difficult to establish, but, conservatively, hundreds of thousands of Muslims left the area during this period – primarily resettling in modern-day Turkey – and at least that many were killed. But both figures are likely in the millions. Taken in conjunction with the horrors of the Armenian Genocide, the period marking the end of the Ottoman Empire is likely one of the bloodiest in modern European history, a horrific and sustained unmixing of peoples.

But the new state system that emerged in South-eastern and Eastern Europe in the wake of the Ottoman era was weak. The new nationalist regimes were perennially unsatisfied with the boundaries of their territories and devoted the brunt of their meager resources to war making rather than the development of local economies or civil societies. By the time the First World War began in 1914, most of the region had already seen two devastating years of fighting and atrocities during the Balkan Wars of 1912-1914. After 1918, the long-promised unification of the South Slavs produced the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes, a union so ensnared by crisis and factionalism that its brief experiment with parliamentary democracy lasted barely a decade before it was aborted by the autocratic Serbian crown. By the time of the Axis invasion of what was then called the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, the country was effectively on the brink of civil war.

The second Yugoslav state, the one formed by Josip Broz Tito's communists after the Second World War, lasted twice as long as its predecessor, but it too collapsed under the weight of authoritarian and sectarian animus. Once more, it was the regime in Belgrade, this time led by the soon-to-be genocidaire Slobodan Milošević, that whipped up Serbian nationalism to carve out a "Greater Serbia" from the carcass of the Yugoslav federation. Fusing medieval myths with sectarian grievances from the 20th century and disseminating it through modern propaganda techniques, Milošević, an erstwhile and middling communist apparatchik, presented himself as the new Lazar.

The four subsequent wars he launched – in Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia, and Kosovo – spanned the entire

decade of the 1990s, resulting in the deaths of nearly 150,000 people, with two-thirds of these occurring during the Bosnian War. The concurrent Bosnian Genocide was not merely a byproduct of Milošević's project but, in fact, its primary objective. The creation of the so-called *Republika Srpska* in Bosnia and Herzegovina (and the *Republika Srpska Karjina* in Croatia) – the breakaway territories self-declared by local proxies of the Belgrade regime, similar to the Russian-occupied “People's Republics” in eastern Ukraine today – was explicitly premised on the wholesale removal and extermination of the non-Serb populations of these areas; in many cases, these populations constituted the *majority* in the targeted region.

There was no motive for Milošević's policies in Bosnia, or the policies of his proxies, other than the imposition of ethnic homogeneity through violence and terror. These were both the aim and the method for achieving these objectives. But the outward face of the project – embodied by the telegenic figures of Karadžić and Milošević, who both spoke fluent English – was pure equivocation. Though both Karadžić and Milošević routinely denied the systematic nature of their genocide, they never denied its necessity. Here they remained categorical: The Bosniaks, like the Kosovar Albanians, were an abscess that had to be removed from the body of Christian Europe. It was ugly going, to be sure, but they were the knights on the ramparts “guarding” the whole of the continent. In the fevered swamps of the Serbian tabloids, the language was even more explicit: Serbia was Byzantium restored, the cradle of Christian civilization, taking its glorious vengeance on the Turks, the Moors, and the whole of the Muslim world.

From the onset, this narrative made inroads into segments of the West. Robert Kaplan's 1993 "Balkan Ghosts" did not embrace the Bosnian Genocide but, like Steyn, he framed it as a historical inevitability; the triumph of what he infamously called "ancient ethnic hatreds." Kaplan's framing was formative, profoundly shaping the views of then-U.S. President Bill Clinton in (initially) rejecting the possibility of American or international intervention in the war. After all, what business did Washington have in meddling in this primordial bloodletting? British and French officials of the time were even more blunt in their remarks to Clinton: The events in Bosnia were "painful" but also the "necessary restoration of Christian Europe."

Such attitudes were widespread, especially in Europe. The Austrian novelist and playwright Peter Handke, for instance, explicitly defended Milošević and his war effort. As soon as the Bosnian War had ended, Handke toured the killing fields and partied with the killers. He was a guest of honor at Milošević's funeral and delivered his eulogy. Such abasement notwithstanding, he was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 2019. *Living Marxism*, the magazine of the U.K.-based Revolutionary Communist Party, falsely claimed that photographs from the Trnopolje and Omarska concentration camps were staged. One of the magazine's editors, Claire Fox, eventually went on to join the Brexit Party (now Reform UK) and today sits as a member of the House of Lords, the upper house of the U.K. Parliament.

While the Clinton administration finally – and begrudgingly – intervened in the war, European governments remained largely unmoved even as they watched the killings in Srebrenica unfold in real time.

After 9/11, preexisting revisionist and negationist discourses about Bosnia began to aggressively percolate through a newly invigorated Western far right. The attacks on the Twin Towers and the Pentagon recast the nature of Milošević and Karadžić's project; to Western reactionaries it became a prophetic war, led by men who recognized the true threat of "militant Islam" and thus the need for a true clash of civilizations. That the cause of Bosnian independence was overwhelmingly secular, led by a multiethnic coalition of Bosnians of all ethnicities and religions, including non-nationalist Serbs, of course, never entered this discourse.

By the 2010s, Bosnian Genocide denial and the valorization of Serb nationalist war criminals became a staple of Western far-right discourses – a pillar of their ideological and political lexicon like the Confederacy, the Third Reich, or the African apartheid regimes. It soon started featuring in the manifestos of far-right terrorists.

Anders Breivik, the terrorist who executed the attacks in Norway in 2011, made nearly 1,000 mentions of the Yugoslav Wars in his meandering manifesto. Eric Frein, who orchestrated the 2014 attack on the Pennsylvania State Police barracks, frequently cosplayed in Serb nationalist uniforms. And Brenton Tarrant, sentenced to life imprisonment for the 2019 Christchurch mosque killings, covered his rifles and munitions in the names of Serb and Montenegrin historical figures and livestreamed himself playing a Serb nationalist ballad glorifying Karadžić's genocide from the Bosnian War. And while the 2019 El Paso terrorist did not cite Serb nationalist motifs, his manifesto credits Tarrant and the Great Replacement as his primary inspirations, directing his ire at Latinos and Hispanics rather than Muslims.

In the sewers of the online far right, Serb nationalist themes are even more prominent. The song Tarrant played on his way to massacre the congregants in Christchurch is a well-known meme among extremists and gamers. The original is titled “Karadžiću, vodi Srbe svoje” (“Karadžić, lead your Serbs”) but it is known online primarily as the “Remove Kebab Song” or “Serbia Strong.” Among the far right, “kebab” is used as a derogatory term for Muslims, and Tarrant referred to himself as a “kebab removalist” in his manifesto. A cursory search for the song on platforms like YouTube reveals millions of views and hundreds of thousands of comments, most of them in English. Those willing to dive deeper into the underground forums and message boards of the far right will easily discover their intimate familiarity with the Bosnian Genocide and the deeds of Serb nationalist genocidaires.

As the Western far right gains political currency in Europe and the U.S., it is likely that their interest in the wars in Bosnia and Kosovo will become more pronounced. The turn toward paranoid identity politics and demographic fetishism among ostensibly center-right parties on both sides of the Atlantic readily comports to the ideological discourses developed by Serb nationalists during the 1980s and 1990s. Their current encounters with similar “traditionalist” and “patriotic” discourses emanating from Russia – and the Kremlin’s court intellectuals like Aleksandr Dugin or the late faux-dissident Eduard Limonov (a close associate of Karadžić) – will also serve to further disseminate Serb nationalist ideas, as Moscow is the primary international patron of the revisionist regimes in Belgrade and Bosnia’s *Republika Srpska*.

Following the sacking of the U.S. Capitol by an extremist mob on Jan. 6, 2021, the ascendancy of far-right movements in the established democracies has finally landed as, arguably, the central national security issue facing the West. Confronting the QAnon cult has required that researchers and law enforcement decode an obscurantist ideological and political lexicon; the same will be required in recognizing the extent to which Serb nationalist ideas have penetrated many of these same extremist circles.

Beyond the immediate security concerns, however, the Bosnian Genocide should serve as a critical lesson for democratic societies everywhere. Genocides are not sudden eruptions of freewheeling violence. They are meticulously organized, administratively complex undertakings. They require project managers, bureaucrats, and executioners. Above all, they require ideological justifications. The ideas and discourses of the architects of the Bosnian Genocide have already taken root in the West, contributing to many deaths. Failure to recognize this runs the risk of letting Bosnia's recent past shape our collective future.

# 25 Years After Srebrenica: “Local” Genocide in a Global Context

HARIZ HALILOVICH\*

IT'S A QUARTER OF A CENTURY – and a half of my lifetime – since the 1995 Srebrenica genocide happened. Actually, to be more accurate, this genocide (like any other genocide) did not just happen; it was a planned, intentional crime committed by an army and the police trained, equipped and sponsored by Bosnia's neighbour, the state of Serbia. They were the perpetrators – “beyond a reasonable doubt”, as numerous judgments by the ICTY have established<sup>1</sup> – but this genocide was, in many regards, allowed to happen by the important actors within the international community who had chosen to play the role of passive bystanders, even though such a role was not only morally wrong but also against the international law and the 1951 Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime

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<sup>1</sup> See: International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) (2018) ‘Srebrenica Genocide: No Room For Denial’: <https://www.icty.org/en/outreach/documentaries/srebrenica-genocide-no-room-for-denial>

of Genocide. Moreover, while representing the first act of genocide in Europe after the Holocaust, this was also the first genocide ever to happen in an United Nations Safe Area (which sadly proved to be rather an un-safe area).<sup>2</sup> At the time, the United Nations had its troops on the ground in Srebrenica with the mandate to protect people trapped in this largest refuge for Bosniaks in eastern Bosnia. However, instead of this mission becoming a triumph of the United Nations, in July 1995 Srebrenica became a triumph of the evil and the lowest point in the UN history.<sup>3</sup>

The world, represented by its peak body the UN, was humiliated, and an import part of the belief in humanism and our shared humanity perished in Srebrenica 25 years ago. Indeed, in a critical internal review in 1999, UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan admitted: "Through error, misjudgement and an inability to recognize the scope of the evil confronting us, we failed to do our part to help save the people of Srebrenica from the Serb campaign of mass murder".<sup>4</sup> This and all other countless statements, reports, resolutions and

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<sup>2</sup> See: Brzezinski, Z. (1993) 'Never Again – Except for Bosnia', *The New York Times*, 22 April, p. 1.; Cigar, N. (1995) *Genocide in Bosnia: The Policy of 'Ethnic Cleansing' in Eastern Europe* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press).; Cushman, T. and Meštrović, S. (1996) 'Introduction' in T. Cushman and S. Meštrović (eds) *This Time We Knew: Western Responses to Genocide in Bosnia* (New York: New York University Press), pp. 1–38.

<sup>3</sup> Waterfield, B. (2011) 'Ratko Mladic arrest: Srebrenica massacre was UN's darkest hour', *The Telegraph*: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk> (home page); H. Nuhanović (2007) *Under the UN Flag: The International Community and the Srebrenica Genocide* (Sarajevo: DES).

<sup>4</sup> United Nations (1999) 'Report of the Secretary-General Pursuant to General Assembly Resolution 53/35: The Fall of Srebrenica': <http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/3ae6afb34.html>

declarations by prominent representatives of the United Nations and the international community made since then cannot unmake what happened in this picturesque Bosnian valley, a mere 500 kilometres from Vienna, at the end of the twentieth century. While remaining a real place with real victims and real survivors (and real perpetrators!), Srebrenica also continues to serve as a metaphor for a “bystanders’ genocide” – a genocide that could have and should have been prevented.<sup>5</sup>

In the policy domain, and in the programs funded by various international organizations, the overwhelming emphasis when it comes to the Srebrenica genocide over the last 25 years has been on “moving forward” and “overcoming the troubled past”. However, for many people – especially for the genocide survivors – what is depicted as a “troubled” or “unresolved past” is in fact an *unresolved present*, still affecting them on a daily basis individually and collectively. Like for everyone else who was born or once lived in the region of eastern Bosnia, the Srebrenica genocide continues to be my own *unresolved present*, and has become a part of both my personal and my communal or collective memory and identity.<sup>6</sup> In these 25 years, the genocide has changed me and my generation – those of us who were lucky not to end up in a mass grave. On many July 11, at the collective burials of the identified genocide victims that started in 2005, many of us, including myself, carried the coffins of our close

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<sup>5</sup> Halilovich, H. (2015) ‘Lessons from Srebrenica: The United Nations after Bosnia’, in D. Mayersen (ed.), *The United Nations and Genocide* (London & New York: Palgrave), pp. 77-100.

<sup>6</sup> Halilovich, H. (2020) ‘The Srebrenica genocide has changed me and my generation’, *Justice.info*: <https://www.justiceinfo.net/en/justiceinfo-comment-and-debate/opinion/44853-the-srebrenica-genocide-has-changed-me-and-my-generation.html>.

relatives and childhood friends to their final resting places at the Memorial Cemetery in Potočari. Every time, we felt that in these green light coffins (often containing just a few bones) we were also burying a part of ourselves.<sup>7</sup>

The cemetery is just across the road from a former battery factory, which back in 1995 served as military headquarters of the UN Dutch battalion. The large black letters "U.N" still stand written on a massive concrete block at the entrance of the former UN base. Inside the compound, the graffiti left by the Dutch soldiers are still visible on the walls. One graffiti reads 'United Nothing', many others have clearly racist and sexist content written in the most vulgar and graphic terms, all referring to the local population that these soldiers were meant to protect. Those who composed, read and allowed these insulting graffiti to be written here obviously did not empathise with the "dirty Bosnians" under their protection. That lack of empathy towards the local population and their dehumanization inscribed on the walls in Potočari might provide some answers why the UN Dutch Battalion did nothing to prevent the killings of the Srebrenica men and boys by general Mladić's army back then in 1995. Twenty-five years later I still wonder how this was possible.

### **Shades of Justice**

In regards to the Srebrenica genocide and a plethora of other crimes committed across Bosnia in the 1990s, much of the last quarter of a century was marked by the arrests of the fugitive masterminds and perpetrators

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<sup>7</sup> Halilovich, H. (2017) *Kako opisati Srebrenicu/Writing After Srebrenica*, (Buybook: Sarajevo).

and their subsequent extraditions to and judicial proceedings at the Hague Tribunal, The International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY). Without the ICTY it is hard to believe that many of the accused would ever enter a courtroom as defendants for war crimes and genocide. While there are very strong, and often antagonistic, sentiments about the work and existence of the ICTY held by different groups in the region – especially among Serb nationalists who perceive it to be an “anti-Serb court” – many ordinary people in the region agree that the ICTY was the most important institution addressing the crimes and injustices against a wide section of civilian population during the 1990s. However, there is also a widely-shared perception that the ICTY has largely been mild in its sentences<sup>8</sup>, while spending too much time and resources on the perpetrators’ defense, treating them as “if they committed a traffic offence rather than genocide”, as Munira Subašić, a mother from Srebrenica, bluntly put it. Another source of frustration for the survivors comes from the fact that the ICTY has not delivered any real restorative justice as there hasn’t been any direct benefit to the survivors and their communities from the sentences; the survivors who returned to their pre-war places still live under a *de facto* apartheid regime in Republika Srpska (RS), a Serb-controlled entity in Bosnia that was created through genocide and ethnic cleansing during the war.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Hoare, M.A. (2011) ‘A Case Study of Underachievement: The International Courts and Genocide in Bosnia’, *Genocide Studies and Prevention*, (6)1, 81-97.

<sup>9</sup> See: Karčić, H. (2008) “‘Fear Not, For You Have Brothers in Greece’”: A Research Note, *Genocide Studies and Prevention* 3 (1), 147-152; Karčić, H. (2015) ‘Uncovering the Truth: The Lake Perućac Exhumations in Eastern Bosnia’, *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs* 37 (1), 114-128.

More disappointingly, there hasn't really been any rehabilitation of the war criminals after they completed their sentences in one of the many ICTY-designated prisons spread across the Western Europe and Scandinavia. Upon their release, rather than coming out as reformed people and distancing themselves from their inhumane deeds and war crimes for which they had been sentenced, many prominent ICTY inmates have continued to deny, justify and glorify these crimes, thereby gaining themselves the status of heroes in the eyes of the nationalist political establishment and many fellow co-ethnics.<sup>10</sup> Of course, this trend is not a result of some spontaneous revival of the war-time "heroism", but rather a carefully orchestrated political campaign run by those who continue to benefit from the legacy of the war crimes and genocide committed in Bosnia.

### Genocide Triumphalism

On 20 March 2019, war-time Bosnian Serb leader Radovan Karadžić, president of the self-proclaimed Republika Srpska and the supreme commander of the Serb forces during the 1992-95 war, had his 40-year sentence extended to life in prison by the ICTY appeal court in The Hague. The list of war crimes for which Karadžić was sentenced include genocide, persecution, extermination, murder, deportation, terror,

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<sup>10</sup> Obradovic-Wochnik, J. (2014) 'Revisionism, Denial and anti-ICTY Discourse in Serbia's Public Sphere: Beyond the 'Divided Society' Debate' in J. Gow, R. Kerr and Z. Pajic (eds) *Prosecuting War Crimes: Lessons and Legacies of the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia* (New York: Routledge), pp. 182-203.

unlawful attacks on civilians and hostage-taking.<sup>11</sup> In spite of the judicial ruling and the abundance of material evidence presented in the court proceedings, Serb nationalists in Bosnia and in Serbia have refused to accept the verdict. For them, Karadžić remains one of the greatest Serb heroes. Three years before, on 20 March 2016 – just after the ICTY handed down its 40-year sentence to Karadžić – Milorad Dodik, at the time President of the Serb-dominated Bosnian entity of RS and the current Serb member of the Bosnian Presidency, ceremonially opened a student dormitory named after Radovan Karadžić in Pale near Sarajevo. Before and since then, Dodik has awarded Karadžić and other sentenced high-ranking war criminals RS' highest official honours. Honouring and celebrating sentenced war criminals in RS and in Serbia has been a continuing part of the Bosnia's post-genocide reality over the past 25 years.

This and other actions have been a part of a coordinated institutional effort by RS and Serbia to create an alternative narrative and an alternate reality to the one based on the facts established through the ICTY and as documented by various international media and other organisations during and after the war. The construction of that alternative narrative and reality has also involved marking of unconstitutional days such as 9 January as “Day of Republika Srpska”, building grandiose monuments to RS war-time legacy, even at the places where Serbs were perpetrators such as at the former concentration camp site in Trnopolje near Prijedor, or other similar places of

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<sup>11</sup> ICTY (2020) Case No. IT-95-5-I: ‘The Prosecutor of the Tribunal Against Radovan Karadzic and Ratko Mladic’: <http://www.icty.org/x/cases/mladic/ind/en/kar-ii950724e.pdf>

sufferings where Serb militias committed war crimes during the 1990s: in Foča, Višegrad, Bratunac and across the RS entity. Similarly, the Serb Orthodox Church has been very active in marking and 'serbianising' the RS territory by erecting church buildings in Muslim villages and neighbourhoods, sometimes even on private Muslim properties as it has been the case of the infamous church in the front yard of Fata Orlović, a Muslim woman, a survivor and a returnee to her ethnically cleansed village of Konjević Polje near Srebrenica.

While these and a plethora of other activities promoted from above, i.e. by the Serb political elites and cultural institutions, would have been considered as extremist and unacceptable shortly after the war, today, 25 years after the Srebrenica genocide, they have rather become a norm and an integral part of a flourishing culture of triumphalism across a broad spectrum of the society in RS, Serbia, and even internationally.<sup>12</sup> This culture of genocide triumphalism goes beyond genocidal denial, in genocide studies also known as the last stage of genocide.<sup>13</sup> Namely, in Serbia and the Serb controlled part of Bosnia (RS), the Srebrenica genocide is not merely denied anymore, but it is celebrated and its perpetrators glorified, while the Bosniak survivors are exposed to humiliating and degrading treatment, if they choose to return to their pre-war places now in RS.

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<sup>12</sup> Mujanović, J. (2021) 'The Balkan Roots of the Far Right's "Great Replacement" Theory', *Newslines*: <https://newlinesmag.com/essays/the-balkan-roots-of-the-far-rights-great-replacement-theory/>

<sup>13</sup> Halilovich, H. (2017) 'Globalisation and genocide', in A. Farazmand (ed.) *Global Public Administration, Public Policy, and Governance* (New York: Springer), pp. 1-8.

Like in the previous years, Srebrenica and the memory of the genocide victims has again been desecrated in 2020 by posters and billboards featuring the war criminal general Ratko Mladić, sentenced by the ICTY to life imprisonment, celebrating 11 July 1995 as the “Liberation Day of Srebrenica”. This culture of genocide triumphalism by Serb nationalists is not limited to the month of July. Throughout the year, Bosniak returnees to Srebrenica have to endure many other direct and indirect forms of humiliation and discrimination. For instance, at the local schools, Bosniak children are not allowed to name their language Bosnian. Turning TVs in their homes, the returnees in Srebrenica can watch how genocide and their suffering have become a part of what could be called a genocide entertainment industry promoted through the mainstream Serbian media such as the popular Belgrade-based TV Happy. This TV and its popular journalist Milomir Marić regularly host talk shows with sentenced war criminals like Vojislav Šešelj, making jokes about Srebrenica and the collective burials of Muslim victims on 11 July. These and other similar TV shows in Serbia have continued broadcasting their hate speech without any sanctions. On the contrary, they have become a popular form of entertainment not only among the hard-core nationalists but also among the Serbian mainstream. Popularised through mass media, the genocide in Srebrenica has become a subject of songs, increasingly performed at the Serbian folk festivities and even private celebrations such as weddings and birthday parties. Social media and the internet have been used for sharing home videos of such events where ordinary people, sometimes including children, can be seen happily

dancing and singing along the songs with lyrics that mock and glorify the Srebrenica genocide and call for the same scenario to be repeated in other places.

### **Internationalization of genocide denial and triumphalism**

But what happened in the Balkans did not stay in the Balkans. The Srebrenica genocide and the associated phenomenon of triumphalism have long gained an international dimension.<sup>14</sup> There are several forms in which this has been performed in an international context. For instance, Radovan Karadžić and other masterminds of genocide were awarded prestigious accolades in Russia and Greece. Similarly, it is a well-known that Russia has been providing financial support to the local Serb nationalist organizations (like NGO "Eastern Alternative") and financing their campaign of genocide denial and triumphalism in Bosnia. The Srebrenica genocide and other similar crimes committed by the Serb militias against Muslims during the 1990s have been widely adopted as an ideological pillar by the far-right across the world, and have provided inspiration to the two largest massacres by the white supremacists in recent times: in Norway in 2011, and New Zealand in 2019.<sup>15</sup> Within the mainstream, the 2019 Nobel Prize for Literature awarded to the Austrian writer Peter Handke has been seen by many as normalising the Srebrenica genocide denial. Namely, much of Handke's work and political activ-

<sup>14</sup> Halilovich, H. (2019) 'Long-Distance Hatred: How the NZ Massacre Echoed Balkan War Crimes', *Transitions*: <https://tol.org/client/article/author/hariz-halilovich>

<sup>15</sup> See: Mujanović (2021); Halilovich (2019).

ism over the last three decades has been in support to the Serb nationalist cause and denial the crimes the Serb nationalists committed, including the Srebrenica genocide.

While targeting a specific ethnic, religious, racial or cultural group for annihilation, genocide as “crime of all crimes”, as Raphael Lemkin<sup>16</sup> called it, is ultimately a crime against the humanity in its totality; thus, Srebrenica must never be seen as some “local genocide” against Muslims on Europe’s periphery. The perpetrators and their sympathizers of this genocide have put it in a broader, international context ontologically and logistically (including participation of Greek and Russian volunteers in the actual killings at Srebrenica in July 1995). Similarly, sanctioning genocide denial and triumphalism is not just a matter for the politically paralyzed state of Bosnia and Herzegovina, but must go hand in hand with combating racism and the politics of hatred that have been on the rise globally. In my view, this would be the best way to honour the victims of the last European genocide.

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<sup>16</sup> Lemkin, R. (2002) ‘Genocide’, in A. Hinton (ed.) *Genocide: An Anthropological Reader* (Oxford: Blackwell), pp. 27-42.

# Killing Memory: The Destruction of Srebrenica's Cultural and Religious Heritage

ANDRÁS RIEDLMAYER\*

WHAT DISTINGUISHES GENOCIDE from mass murder, in law and in fact, is intent. The victims of genocide are deliberately targeted for destruction on the basis of their membership in a community defined by specific cultural characteristics – for being part of a national, ethnic, racial or religious group.<sup>1</sup>

The link between genocide and attacks on the targeted community's cultural and religious heritage and symbols is evident to most observers, and it

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<sup>1</sup> United Nations. Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, approved and proposed for signature and ratification or accession by General Assembly resolution 260 A (III) of 9 December 1948, downloaded from: <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/crimeofgenocide.aspx>; Kai Ambos. "What Does 'Intent to Destroy' in Genocide Mean?" *International Review of the Red Cross*, 91 no. 876 (Dec. 2009): 833-58, downloaded from: <https://www.cambridge.org/core/services/aop-cambridge-core/content/view/S1816383110000056>; Johannes Morsink. "Cultural Genocide, the Universal Declaration, and Minority Rights," *Human Rights Quarterly* 21 no. 4 (Nov. 1999): 1009-60, downloaded from: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/762755?seq=1>

has gained increasing recognition by the courts. The ICTY's judgement in the Krstić case states:

“Where there is physical or biological destruction there are often simultaneous attacks on the cultural and religious property and symbols of the targeted group as well, attacks which may legitimately be considered as evidence of an intent to physically destroy the group. In this case, the Trial Chamber will thus take into account as evidence of intent to destroy the group the deliberate destruction of mosques and houses belonging to members of the group.”<sup>2</sup>

The perpetrators of genocide also view culture as key to their enterprise, which is why they treat its destruction as a matter of priority. In the midst of war, they devote manpower and resources to destroying the landmarks and visible symbols of the targeted community.<sup>3</sup>

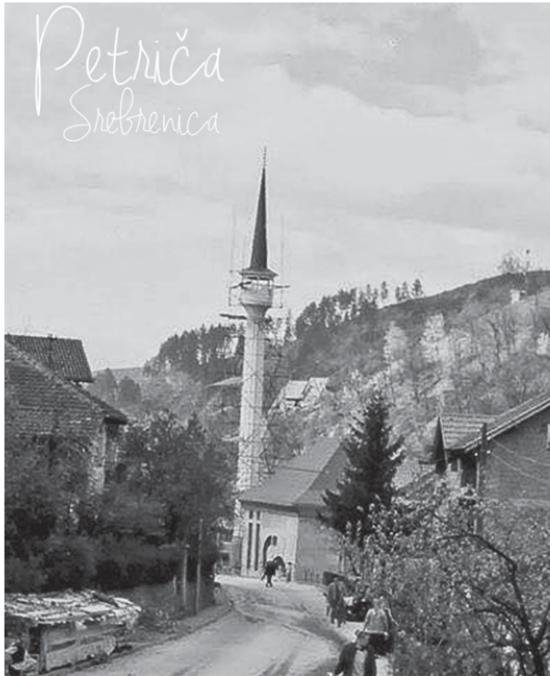
Here is Drina Corps Commander General Milenko Živanović, speaking at a celebration held on 12 July 1995 in Vlasenica, recounting how he and General Mladić entered Srebrenica the day before:

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<sup>2</sup> Prosecutor v. Krstić, ICTY-IT-98-33-T (Trial Chamber Judgement), par. 580 (2 August 2001); see also: Prosecutor v. Krstić, ICTY-IT-98-33-A (Appeals Chamber Judgement), Partial dissenting opinion of Judge Shahabuddeen, par. 53 (19 April 2004).

<sup>3</sup> Serge Brammertz, Kevin C. Hughes, Alison Kipp and William B. Tomljanovich, “Attacks against Cultural Heritage as a Weapon of War: Prosecutions at the ICTY,” *Journal of International Criminal Justice* 14 (2016), 1143-74, downloaded from: <https://doi.org/10.1093/jicj/mqw066>; Helen Walasek, *Bosnia and the Destruction of Cultural Heritage* (Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate, 2015); András Riedlmayer, “From the Ashes: The Past and Future of Bosnia’s Cultural Heritage,” in: *Islam and Bosnia: Conflict Resolution and Foreign Policy in Multi-Ethnic States*, ed. Maya Shatzmiller (Montreal: McGill-Queens University Press, 2002): 98-135, downloaded from: <http://heritage.sensecentar.org/assets/uploads/sg-7-09-riedlmayer-from-the-ashes-en.pdf>

“...I went on the asphalt road Jadar, Kožlje, Rajine, Petriča, and saw a minaret reaching the sky. I think already this morning it has been flattened – it should have been this morning. Trust me, I only looked toward our church spire and some wish of mine carried me on to that point as soon as possible.”<sup>4</sup>



*Srebrenica – Petrička džamija (Photo: ESrebrenica / Facebook)*

<sup>4</sup> VRS General Milivoje Živanović, standing next to Bishop Vasilije Kačavenda, at a Petrovdan celebration on 12 July 1995 in Vlasevica, recounting his role in the ‘liberation’ of Srebrenica; video footage at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Gq8pKW7Dg7M> (starting at 28:55); English translation: Prosecutor v. Mladić ICTY-IT-09-92, Trial video Srebrenica – V000-9265, ET subtitles transcripts (p. 18 of 29), downloaded from <https://icr.icty.org/LegalRef/CMSDocStore/Public/English/Exhibit/NotIndexable/IT-09-92/ACE134980R0000505350.pdf>

This is the mosque General Živanović was talking about, in the Petriča mahala neighborhood, where the road from the south enters Srebrenica. It was built in 1991, to replace an older mosque that had fallen into disrepair.<sup>5</sup> The new Petrička mosque was already in use from 1992, but the finishing touches could not be completed due to the outbreak of the war, which is why its tall minaret was still surrounded by scaffolding at the time of the fall of Srebrenica in 1995.

As it turned out, the tall minaret was not flattened right away, as General Živanović predicted. In the video footage shot by Belgrade journalist Zoran Petrović Piroćanac on 14 July 1995, three days after the fall of Srebrenica, is still seen standing. But not for long.



*Srebrenica – Petrička džamija, 1996 (Photo: Sava Radovanović/AP)*

<sup>5</sup> Madžida Bećirbegović, *Džamije sa drvenom munarom u Bosni i Hercegovini* (Sarajevo: Veselin Masleša, 1990): 113-14; Ahmed Hrustanović, “Legenda o samotnjaku iz Srebrenice: džaba rušite džamije, niknuće još ljepše,” *Al Jazeera Balkans* 9 February 2020, downloaded from <http://balkans.aljazeera.net/blog/legenda-o-samotnjaku-iz-srebrenice-dzaba-rusite-dzamije-niknuce-jos-ljepse>



*Srebrenica – Petrička džamija, 1996 (Photo: IFOR)*

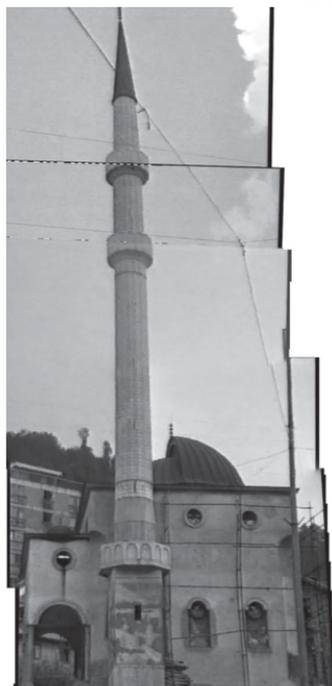
In this photo, taken shortly after the end of the war, on 3 January 1996 by an Associated Press news photographer, one can see the destroyed concrete minaret of the Petrička mosque, its steel reinforcing rods spread apart by the force of the explosives used to destroy it, fallen on top of the mosque.

One can see the damage more clearly in another photo, taken by an IFOR peacekeeping patrol heading south out of Srebrenica in the spring of 1996. Take note of the houses at left. Some months later, the ruins of this mosque and of other mosques in the town center were bulldozed by order of the Serb municipal authorities. In the photograph below, taken in July 1998, the houses surrounding the site look the same, but only a pile of rubble indicates that a mosque once stood there.



*Srebrenica – Petrička džamija, 1998 (Photo: Joann Kingsley)*

In the center of Srebrenica stood the town's largest mosque, the Čaršijska džamija, the Market Mosque. Built shortly before the war to replace an older mosque that had fallen into disrepair, the new Market Mosque had also made it through the 1992-95 siege unharmed. In May 1995, the mosque was scene of the Srebrenica community's last, festive Baĵram prayers.



*Srebrenica – Čaršijska džamija, 14/07/1995, (Photo: Zoran Petrović / ICTY screenshots)*

In this composite photo, taken from Zoran Petrović's 14 July 1995 video, one can see the Srebrenica Market Mosque's tall minaret still standing. The same video footage also shows Bosnian Serb soldiers, posing for trophy photos in front of the intact Market Mosque. For future reference, note the little square windows at the ground level of the mosque.

Five days later, on 19 July 1995, the Market Mosque was blown up by Bosnian Serb Army sappers. Đorđo Vukoje, a reporter for the Belgrade bi-weekly *Srpska Reč*, arrived on the scene just after the minaret had been toppled with explosives, scattering rubble across the square. He secretly took this photo from the front seat of his car. As he notes in the caption of the published version of the photo, this was the last picture taken of the Market Mosque. Half an hour later, he writes, the mosque was "turned into dust and ashes."



*Srebrenica – Čaršijska džamija, 19/07/1995,  
(Photo: Đorđo Vukoje / ICTY)*



*Srebrenica – Čaršijska džamija, 1996,  
(Photo: Amnesty International)*

This is a view of what was left of the Market Mosque at the end of the war, in early 1996. The building is completely destroyed. The concrete roof slab supporting the dome over the main prayer hall has dropped from a height of two storeys, coming to rest at a tilt on top of the remains of the mosque's foundation walls (note the little square windows). The stump of the blown-up minaret, splayed apart by the explosive charges placed in its internal staircase, can be seen at left.

In the summer of 1996 the Market Mosque's ruins were bulldozed and the site was cleared by order of the Serb municipal authorities. The following photo, which I took in July 2002, shows the empty site in the center of Srebrenica where the Market Mosque once stood, with a stinking deposit of garbage strategically placed next to it.

The remains of the four mosques that had stood in the center of Srebrenica until they were destroyed were taken away and buried in a "mass grave for mosques," which was unearthed by accident during excavation for the construction of a new municipal parking garage in January 2020.<sup>6</sup>



*Srebrenica – Site of the destroyed Čaršijska džamija, 2002  
(Photo: András Riedlmayer)*

<sup>6</sup> Sadik Salimović, "U Srebrenici pronađeni ostaci prijeratne džamije," *Radio Slobodna Evropa*, 16 February 2020, <https://www.slobodnaevropa.org/a/30434530.html>; "Masovna grobnica srebreničkih džamija," *Preporodinfo*, 13 Feb. 2020, <https://www.preporod.info/bs/article/14501/masovna-grobnica-srebrenickih-dzamija>



*Srebrenica – “Mass grave for mosques” uncovered in 2020  
(Photo: Sadik Salimović, RFE/RL)*

One of Srebrenica’s oldest mosques stood in the Crvena Rijeka neighborhood. This mosque had been endowed in the Ottoman period by the Đozić family and was known as the Đozića džamija.<sup>7</sup> It was a traditional Bosnian mosque, with a wooden portico and a wooden minaret sprouting from the roof beams. Below is a prewar photo of the mosque, from the archive of the Institute for the Protection of Cultural Heritage of Bosnia and Herzegovina. The imam’s house, located next to the mosque, also housed the historical records of the Medžlis of the Islamic Community of Srebrenica and a schoolroom for teaching Qur’an reading.

<sup>7</sup> Adib Đozić, “Srebrenica Town Mosques,” in *Srebrenica through Centuries Past*, Monumenta Srebrenica: Research, Documents, Testimonies, book I. (Tuzla: Zavod za zaštitu i korištenje kulturno-historijskog i prirodnog naslijeđa Tuzlanskog kantona, 2012): 37-56; Madžida Bećirbegović, *Džamije sa drvenom minarom u Bosni i Hercegovini* (Sarajevo: Veselin Masleša, 1990): 112-15



*Srebrenica – Dozića džamija, 1980 (Photo: Zavod za zaštitu kulturnog, historijskog i prirodnog naslijeđa Bosne i Hercegovine)*

In 1993, during the siege of Srebrenica by the Bosnian Serb Army, an aircraft crossed the Drina from the Serbian side of the river and dropped a bomb, damaging the Dozić mosque and killing a member of the congregation. Under siege conditions, the men of the Crvena Rijeka neighborhood worked to repair the damage. A photograph shows the men in front of the repaired mosque, following Friday prayers. Most of the men in the 1993 photo did not survive the July 1995 Genocide.



*Srebrenica – Dozića džamija following repairs, 1993  
(Photo: Centar za islamsku arhitekturu)*

A photograph that I took in July 1992, seven years after the war, shows the imam's house, which had been burned out in 1995, with a new roof and undergoing repairs. Next to the house, the empty site where the historic Đozić mosque once stood is overgrown with weeds.



*Srebrenica – Site of the destroyed Dozića džamija, 2002  
(Photo: András Riedlmayer)*



*Srebrenica – Hadži Skender-begova džamija / White Mosque, 1981,  
(Photo: Ekrem Hakkı Ayverdi)*

The oldest mosque in Srebrenica was the White Mosque, the Mosque of Hadži Skender-beg, built in the seventeenth century atop a rise overlooking the town center. The White Mosque, with its distinctive stone minaret, was surrounded by the Ottoman-era gravestones of an old Bosnian Muslim cemetery.<sup>8</sup> It also survived the 1992-1995 siege undamaged.

<sup>8</sup> Ekrem Hakkı Ayverdi, *Avrupa'da Osmanlı mimârî eserleri, III. cild 3. kitap: Yugoslavya* (Istanbul: İstanbul Fetih Cemiyeti, 1981): 424, pl. 684-686. Sadik Salimović, *Knjiga o Srebrenici* (Srebrenica: Skupština opštine, 2002): 171; Nebojša Tomašević, *Treasures of Yugoslavia: An Encyclopedic Touring Guide* (Belgrade: Yugoslaviapublic, 1980): 321-22.

The White Mosque's dark stone minaret can be seen still standing in the background of Đorđo Vukoje's photograph, taken on 19 July 1995. But shortly after that photograph was taken, the White Mosque was also destroyed with explosives. In a photo taken in 1999, one can see only damaged fragments of the White Mosque's perimeter walls with a gap where the base of the minaret once stood, and in the foreground the old Muslim gravestones of the mosque's cemetery.

In March 2002, the site was cleared for reconstruction, and the White Mosque became the first mosque in Srebrenica to be rebuilt after the end of the war.<sup>9</sup>



*Srebrenica – Ruins of Hadži Skender-begova džamija, 1999  
(Photo: Peter Lippman)*

<sup>9</sup> “New mosque brings hope for Srebrenica,” BBC Monitoring, 6 July, 2002, downloaded from [http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/world/monitoring/media\\_reports/2104350.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/world/monitoring/media_reports/2104350.stm)



*Srebrenica – Site of Hadži Skender-begova džamija, 03/2002  
(Photo: Flip Franssen)*

When I visited Srebrenica on my survey for the Hague tribunal the summer of 2002, I saw the newly rebuilt White Mosque and the town's Serb Orthodox church facing each other on the heights overlooking the market square – the first visible indication that postwar Srebrenica could once again be a town that accommodates the cultural and religious needs of both of its major ethnic communities.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Unlike Srebrenica's mosques, the Serb Orthodox church in the center of Srebrenica was still standing at the end of the 1992-1995 war, with some damage to the top of its steeple. It was renovated in 2001-2003. Arhijerejsko namjesništvo srebreničko-podrinjsko, "Parohija srebrenička (Srebrenica)," downloaded from <https://web.archive.org/web/20150219071734/http://www.namjesnistvosrebrenickopodrinjsko.org/index.php/2014-10-08-08-52-39>



*Srebrenica – White Mosque following postwar reconstruction, 2002  
(Photo DW/Picture Alliance)*

On a hill overlooking the Srebrenica suburb of Soloćuša and the road heading north towards Bratunac stood the Vidikovac mosque, endowed in 1989 by Azem Begić.<sup>11</sup> In the last months of the 1992-1995 siege, the mosque's roof had suffered damage from Bosnian Serb Army shelling, but the Vidikovac mosque was still being used for communal prayers during Srebrenica's last wartime Bajram holiday, in May 1995.

<sup>11</sup> Adib Dozić, "Srebrenica Town Mosques," in *Srebrenica through Centuries Past*, Monumenta Srebrenica: Research, Documents, Testimonies, book I. (Tuzla: Zavod za zaštitu i korištenje kulturno-historijskog i prirodnog naslijeđa Tuzlanskog kantona, 2012):51.



*Srebrenica – The Vidikovac mosque during the war, 1994  
(Photo: Facebook)*

In the Zoran Petrović Piroćanac video, the Vidikovac mosque and its minaret can still be seen standing as of 14 July 1995. But not for long. Like the other mosques in Srebrenica, the mosque Azem Begić built on Vidikovac hill was blown up with high explosives and left a gutted ruin.

One of the most haunting sights I saw during my fieldwork was the mosque in Gornji Potočari, on a wooded ridge on the west side of the valley where the Srebrenica memorial cemetery now lies. The mosque was a ruin, with the gravestones of generations of Bosnian Muslims in its overgrown cemetery the only reminder that it had once served a living community.



*Srebrenica – Ruins of the destroyed Vidikovac mosque, 1999  
(Photo: Peter Lippman)*

I was guided there by Alija-efendija Jusić, who had served as the head imam in Srebrenica during the war. In July 1995, he had joined members of his congregation on the harrowing march to Tuzla. He said that after the fall of Srebrenica, when people were setting out on the long and dangerous trek through the woods to Tuzla, they came to this mosque to say their last prayers, asking for God's protection. Many of them did not make it to Tuzla alive.



*Srebrenica – Gornji Potočari mosque, 2002*  
(Photo: András Riedlmayer)

There was a traditional stone mosque in the village of Slapovići, in a wooded valley 5 km west of Srebrenica. The village had a long history as a Bosniak settlement, with centuries-old Ottoman grave-stones in its cemetery. In 1923, a prosperous local resident, Mula Selim Alemić endowed land and built a bridge, a water mill and a *mejtes* (Qur'an school) for Slapovići. In 1936 he also endowed a new mosque, built to replace an older mosque that had fallen into disrepair. People from eight surrounding settlements came to the new mosque for Friday and holiday prayers.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>12</sup> Adem Mehmedović, "Najveći vakuf na području Srebrenice," *Stav*, 15 October 2018, downloaded from <https://arhiv.stav.ba/najveći-vakuf-na-području-srebrenice/>; "Slapovićka džamija jedina u Srebrenici zadržala prijeratni izgled," *Avaz*, 17 October 2009.



*Slapovići – Mula Selim Alemić and village residents, 1930s  
(Photo: Arhiv.Stav.ba)*



*Slapovići – Opening of the rebuilt Slapovići mosque, 2011  
(Photo: Sean Sallup/Getty Images)*

During the siege of Srebrenica, hundreds of Bosniak refugee families sought shelter in Slapovići. When

Srebrenica was overrun by the Bosnian Serb Army in July 1995, the people were forced to flee, and the Slapovići mosque and the village houses were burned down.

In 2008, some of the survivors returned and began to rebuild the mosque in Slapovići, in its original form. Next to the rebuilt mosque is a large memorial tablet, listing the names of people from the village who were killed during the war. For most of them the date of death is 1995. Nineteen of those listed as killed were from the Alemić family.

The destruction of Srebrenica's mosques and of its Bosniak Muslim communities did not start in 1995. It began in the first days of the war. An example is the village of Liješće, in the eastern part of the municipality of Srebrenica, near Skelani on the Drina River. When Liješće was overrun by Bosnian Serb forces on 8 May 1992, its residents were forced to flee, its mosque was burned down, and the mosque's minaret was blown up.



*Liješće – Exterior of the destroyed Liješće mosque, 2002  
(Photo: András Riedlmayer)*



*Liješće – Interior of the destroyed Liješće mosque, 2002  
(Photo: András Riedlmayer)*



*Dobrak – Site of the destroyed Dobrak mosque, 2002  
(Photo: András Riedlmayer)*

That same month in 1992, the mosque in the Bosniak village of Dobrak, 4 km to the west of Skelani, was blown up, its ruins razed and removed, all except



*Dobrak – Rebuilt mosque at Dobrak, 2007  
(Photo: Centar za islamsku arhitekturu)*

for one massive chunk of concrete. The following two photos show the empty site of the mosque, and a view of the mosque after it was rebuilt in 2007 – with the same massive chunk of concrete still in place, next to the road.

Another example of complete destruction is the mosque at Osat, on a high ridge overlooking the Drina valley. The Osat mosque was blown up in March 1993, when the village fell to Serb nationalist forces. In this postwar photo only the base of the destroyed minaret, with its distinctive shape, shows that a mosque once stood here.

Not just the village, but the entire surrounding region is called Osat. Until the Second World War, this area was known for its skilled traditional builders, the *osaćanski neimari*, who built mosques, churches and houses throughout the Drina valley. An example



*Osat – Remains of the destroyed Osat mosque, 2005  
(Photo: MacKenzie Frady Arbogust)*

of their work was the Old Mosque (Stara džamija) in Peći.<sup>13</sup> Built in the eighteenth century the Old Mosque remained intact until 1992, when Peći, too, was overrun and ‘ethnically cleansed’.

Nine years later, in 2001, when the architectural historian Helen Walasek went looking for this mosque, it was a desolate archaeological ruin, hard to locate and even harder to identify, its crumbling walls lost amidst the overgrown vegetation. A small section of the mosque’s damaged outer wall with the mosque’s prayer niche (*mihrab*), inscribed with a verse from the Qur’an (Surah Al Imran 3:37), was the only clue that a mosque once stood here.

<sup>13</sup> Dragiša Milosavljević, *Osaćanski neimari* (Belgrade: Prosveta, 2000); Madžida Bećirbegović, *Džamije sa drvenom munarom u Bosni i Hercegovini* (Sarajevo: Veselin Masleša, 1990).



*Peći – Remains of the Stara džamija, 2001 (Photo: Helen Walasek)*



*Peći – Mihrab of the Stara džamija, 2001 (Photo: Helen Walasek)*



*Peći – Stara džamija, 1990 (Photo: Madžida Bećirbegović)*

Among the few documents that record the Old Mosque in Peći as it once was, are these two photos, published in 1990, just before the war.

The people of Srebrenica made their homes amidst a stunningly beautiful landscape. Over the centuries, their communities produced talented and hard-working people and a rich culture. The followers of genocidal ideologies in the twentieth century attempted to drive out and wipe out both the people and their cultural memory.

All 23 mosques that stood in Srebrenica municipality in 1992 were destroyed during the war. Most of them have been rebuilt since 2002.<sup>14</sup> Against the odds, the Bosniak survivors of the Srebrenica Genocide and their children are trying to prove that the killers of people and memory have not succeeded.

<sup>14</sup> Ahmed Hrustanović, “Legenda o samotnjaku iz Srebrenice: džaba rušite džamije, niknuće još ljepše,” *Al Jazeera Balkans* 9 February 2020, downloaded from <http://balkans.aljazeera.net/blog/legenda-o-samotnjaku-iz-srebrenice-dzaba-rusite-dzami-je-niknuce-jos-ljepse>

# Wings of Denial<sup>1</sup>

ADNAN DELALIĆ

THAT PHOTO SAYS IT ALL.<sup>2</sup> Peter Handke on genocide safari in Srebrenica, mere months after the unspeakable crime. The great white European poet is front and centre, blocking the view of the Cyrillic town sign he presumably can't read. In the background, we see some people, a car, an industrial plant, houses and hills (and the watermark of the Austrian National Library).

He's wearing all black, as if to say: here I am, the angel of death. The evil twin of Bruno Ganz's character in *Wings of Desire*, who longs to immerse himself with the mortals. But unlike the angels in the film he co-wrote, Handke does not care about the people on the ground. As Dževad Karahasan observes, *A Journey to the Rivers: Justice for Serbia* can't be categorized as a travelogue because its author is utterly uninterested in the local culture, customs and

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<sup>1</sup> This article was originally published by Mangal Media on December 2, 2019. year, <https://www.mangalmedia.net/english/wings-of-denial>, accessed 04/06/2021.

<sup>2</sup> [https://handkeonline.onb.ac.at/sites/handkeonline.at/files/styles/fullscreen/public/images/pool/oela\\_sph\\_lw\\_s245\\_60r\\_zugeschnitten.jpg?itok=rNPsBF-n](https://handkeonline.onb.ac.at/sites/handkeonline.at/files/styles/fullscreen/public/images/pool/oela_sph_lw_s245_60r_zugeschnitten.jpg?itok=rNPsBF-n), accessed 04/06/2021.

history.<sup>3</sup> Let alone the displaced and the murdered. The sole purpose of the little information he provides is to show that Peter Handke was there. Selfie culture avant la lettre. Karahasan calls this writing “just navel-gazing chatter where there is nothing but the speaking subject.” And Svetlana Slapšak concludes: “To see in the Serbian people only Milošević’s world and to notice nothing else disqualifies Handke as a writer and an intellectual. [...] Handke has seriously insulted Serbia.”<sup>4</sup>

In 1994, Radovan Karadžić<sup>5</sup> invited his guest, ‘National Bolshevik’<sup>6</sup> Russian poet Eduard Limonov, to his headquarters in Pale. During a tour of the frontlines in Sarajevo, Limonov fired an anti-aircraft machine gun<sup>7</sup> at the besieged city. In his book *Sarajevo Blues*, Semezdin Mehmedinović argues that Limonov came to Pale for “literary consistency.”<sup>8</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Karahasan, Dž., (1996) *Bürger Handke, Serbenvolk*, DIE ZEIT, 08/1996, [https://www.zeit.de/1996/08/Buerger\\_Handke\\_Serbenvolk/komplettansicht](https://www.zeit.de/1996/08/Buerger_Handke_Serbenvolk/komplettansicht), accessed 04/06/2021.

<sup>4</sup> Slapšak, S., (2019), „Peter Handke: žalost Nobelove nagrade“, Peščanik, <https://pescanik.net/peter-handke-zalost-nobelove-nagrade/>, accessed 04/06/2021.

<sup>5</sup> Strauss, J., (2008), *Radovan Karadzic from small time swindler to war criminal*, *The Telegraph*, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/europe/serbia/2445534/Radovan-Karadzic-from-small-time-swindler-to-war-criminal.html>, accessed 04/06/2021.

<sup>6</sup> Reid Ross, A., (2019) *From Exile to Dirtbag: Edgelord geopolitics and the rise of “National Bolshevism in the U.S.”* Areiross blog. Blog post (Jan 19, 2019), <https://medium.com/@areidross/from-exile-to-dirtbag-edgelord-geopolitics-and-the-rise-of-national-bolshevism-in-the-u-s-84822021b0e8>, accessed 10/06/2021.

<sup>7</sup> TVMyCentury, (2013), *Russian Writer Shooting at Sarajevo*, (YouTube video, Apr 27, 2013) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JkjPZvz27mg>, accessed 04/06/2021.

<sup>8</sup> Mehmedinovic, S., (1998) *Sarajevo Blues*, City Lights Publishers, <http://www.citylights.com/book/?GCOI=87286100513330>, accessed 04/06/2021.

One could say Handke came to Milošević's funeral for the same reason. His eulogy went like this:<sup>9</sup>

“The world, the so-called world, knows everything about Yugoslavia, Serbia. The world, the so-called world, knows everything about Slobodan Milošević. The so-called world knows the truth... I don't know the truth. But I look. I listen. I feel. This is why I am here today, close to Yugoslavia, close to Serbia, close to Slobodan Milošević.”

Anyone subject to the colonial gaze will recognize this vain solipsism.

As per Toni Morrison, the very serious function of racism is a distraction. It keeps you from doing your work. Peter Handke gets to spend his time on artful self-expression and formal experimentation. As suggested by the Nobel committee, he gets to explore “the periphery and the specificity of human experience.” He makes use of his powerful European passport to travel the killing fields in the *periphery* (places the displaced and exiled can't return to) and produce literary selfies. European intellectuals and institutions then declare his colonialist corpus as representative of European civilization. Thus, hierarchies are being maintained. We, meanwhile, are being forced to invest an enormous amount of time to protect ourselves from this violence, including those of us who were lucky enough to somehow obtain a Western passport. Handke, by contrast, easily received a Yugoslav passport from the Milošević regime in 1999 while hundreds of thousands of Kosovo

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<sup>9</sup> Hemon, A, (2019), *The Bob Dylan of Genocide Apologists*, The New York Times, Oct. 16, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/10/15/opinion/peter-handke-nobel-bosnia-genocide.html>, accessed 04/06/2021.

Albanians were being stripped of theirs.<sup>10</sup> As Morrison says, “racism keeps you explaining, over and over again, your reason for being.”

To Peter Handke and his disciples, treating people from the Balkans as subhumans, denying genocide, deriding victims of war, trivializing our pain and falsifying our history, means little. For them, this is just another intellectual parlour game, “just navel-gazing chatter.” For us, however, the “flatulence of the colonizer”<sup>11</sup> is an attack on our war-torn subjectivities, salt rubbed into our wounds. Retraumatization, anxiety, insomnia, depression. Weeks of (unpaid) emotional and intellectual labour. Every time a colonizer flatulates again, we have to revisit what was written about it in 2014, 2010, 2006, 2003, 1999, 1996. Once again we find ourselves dredging up ICTY records and defending well-documented facts against ‘alternative facts’.<sup>12</sup> And yet, Bosnian genocide denial is getting worse. The truth seems to matter little in the face of intense Islamophobia and conspiracism.

Someone like Handke may feel entitled to chatter carelessly about marginalized people’s destinies and bystanders may or may not choose to address this. But we don’t have the privilege to ignore the harm caused. After all, you need to defend your very being. Aida Šehović, founder of the nomadic monument *Što*

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<sup>10</sup> Maass, P., (2019), *Why did Nobel winner Peter Handke have a secret passport from Milosevic-era Yugoslavia?*, The Intercept, <https://the-intercept.com/2019/11/06/nobel-prize-literature-peter-handke-yugoslavia-passport/>, accessed 04/06/2021.

<sup>11</sup> Slapšak, S., (2019), *Sorrow of the Nobel prize*, Peščanik.net, <https://pescanik.net/peter-handke-sorrow-of-the-nobel-prize/>, accessed 04/06/2021.

<sup>12</sup> International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia, <https://www.icty.org/>, accessed 08/06/2021.

*Te Nema*,<sup>13</sup> describes the effects of this “threat of complete annihilation” in an open letter to the Nobel committee: “It has taken me days to realize that all of this, everything that I am experiencing is the trauma I carry in my body, manifesting.”<sup>14</sup> Genocide encompasses more than the acts of killing, denial is one aspect of it and language is crucial. As Predrag Dojčinović points out, even “a single speech act can be evidence of genocidal intent.”<sup>15</sup>

It should be emphasized that this is not just about Handke’s private opinions. He has been promoting denialist, apologist and nationalist narratives about the Yugoslav Wars in his literary works for more than two decades. So much for “separating the art from the artist”. The man himself, by the way, does not agree with this idea: “What I write and what I say cannot be separated.”<sup>16</sup> Anyway, to be able to create a safe space for highbrow racism, to declare art a sphere independent from such mundane matters as crimes against humanity, is a symptom of privilege. As Dženita Karić explains:<sup>17</sup>

<sup>13</sup> Šehović, A., Blog Što te nema, <https://www.aidasehovic.com/stotenema>, accessed 04/06/2021.

<sup>14</sup> Šehović, A., *Open Letter to Swedish Academy*, Blog Što te nema, Blogpost October 13, 2019, [https://www.aidasehovic.com/s/OpenLetter\\_to\\_SwedishAcademy\\_by\\_AidaSehovic.pdf](https://www.aidasehovic.com/s/OpenLetter_to_SwedishAcademy_by_AidaSehovic.pdf), accessed 04/06/2021.

<sup>15</sup> Dojčinović, P. (2019), *Propaganda and International Criminal Law: From Cognition to Criminality*, Routledge, Taylor & Francis, <https://books.google.de/books?id=oV-nuwEACAAJ>, accessed 04/06/2021.

<sup>16</sup> Preljević, V. (2019) *Wiederholungstäter Handke*, DerStandard, <https://www.derstandard.de/story/2000110471923/wiederholungstaeter-handke>, accessed 06/06/2021.

<sup>17</sup> Karić, Dž., 2019, Twitter post, Oct 11, <https://twitter.com/DrDzenitaKacic/status/1182419863060414464>, accessed 04/06/2021.

“As Bosnians, Syrians, Albanians, we don’t have the privilege to think of the names of Chomsky, Handke and their ilk without knowing that what they thought and wrote robbed us of humanity. We do not have the privilege to simply disagree with them academically or on artistic grounds. We do not have the privilege to ignore, not again.”

Some commentators, particularly in Germany and Austria, seem to have forgotten every lesson of post-war *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*.<sup>18</sup> A major European institution awarding historical denialism the highest cultural honour (the official Nobel Prize bibliography<sup>19</sup> lists all of Handke’s Balkan-related works) and engaging in the very same behaviour,<sup>20</sup> is a real political liability for the countries in the region. Yet another demonstration of how little Europe cares about the Balkans. Alida Bremer observes that Handke’s defenders mostly seem to rely on his claims for their knowledge of the Balkans.<sup>21</sup> To some degree, this may be because the memory of what happened in the Yugoslav Wars is fading from European consciousness. The moral and intellectual decline of the German-

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<sup>18</sup> *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*, WikiZero <https://www.wikizero.com/en/Vergangenheitsbew%C3%A4ltigung>, accessed 06/06/2021.

<sup>19</sup> The Nobel Prize in Literature 2019: *Biobibliographical notes*, <https://www.nobelprize.org/uploads/2019/10/bio-bibliography-literatureprize2019-3.pdf>, accessed 04/06/2021.

<sup>20</sup> Maass, P., (2019) *Stockholm Syndrome: The Nobel Prize Organization Is Now Fully Engaged in the Business of Genocide Denial*, *The Intercept*, <https://theintercept.com/2019/11/20/peter-handke-nobel-prize-bosnian-genocide/>, accessed 06/06/2021.

<sup>21</sup> Bemer, A. (2019), *Die Spur des Irrläufers, Perlentaucher Online Kulturmagazin mit Presseschau, Rezensionen, Feuilleton* <https://www.perlentaucher.de/essay/peter-handke-und-seine-relativierung-von-srebrenica-in-einer-extremistischen-postille.html>, accessed 05/06/2021.

language discourse on Handke's 'Justice for Milošević' activism from 1996 to 2019 is evident.

Be that as it may, despite his artful obfuscations, there is nothing inconsistent or ambiguous about his positions. For instance, he openly supported Tomislav Nikolić in the 2008 presidential election in Serbia.<sup>22</sup> So receptive was the extreme nationalist *Serbian Radical Party*<sup>23</sup> to Handke offering himself as their poet laureate, that its newspaper *Velika Srbija* (Greater Serbia) at that time campaigned with photos of the Nikolić-Handke meeting (on page 14).<sup>24</sup> Handke's friend,<sup>25</sup> the Serb nationalist cult director Emir Kusturica, clearly understands the political message of this award. For him, the Nobel victory confirms the idea that the independence of Kosovo should never be recognized.<sup>26</sup> Kusturica calls him an "apostle of truth." A nationalist association launched an initiative to erect a bust of Peter Handke in Srebrenica.<sup>27</sup> They want to honour his

<sup>22</sup> Prljević, V., (2019) *Handkes Serbien, Perlentaucher – Online Kulturmagazin mit Presseschau, Rezensionen, Feuilleton*, <https://www.perlentaucher.de/essay/handkes-serbien.html>, accessed 05/06/2021.

<sup>23</sup> Serbian Radical Party, (2017), [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Serbian\\_Radical\\_Party](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Serbian_Radical_Party), accessed 05/06/2021.

<sup>24</sup> Velika Srbija, Novine Srpske radikalne stranke, godina XIX, broj 3004, [https://www.srpskaradikalnastranka.org.rs/files/izdavastvo/velika\\_srbija/Vs3004.pdf](https://www.srpskaradikalnastranka.org.rs/files/izdavastvo/velika_srbija/Vs3004.pdf), accessed 05/06/2021.

<sup>25</sup> Čvorović, G., Handkeu s ljubavlju vino i rakija iz Srbije: Kusturica i ministar Vukosavljević sa nobelovcem na večeri u Parizu, Novosti RS, <http://www.novosti.rs/vesti/kultura.71.html:825737-Handkeu-s-ljubavlju-vino-i-rakija-iz-Srbije-Kusturica-i-ministar-Vukosavljevic-sa-nobelovcem-na-veceri-u-Parizu-FOTO>, accessed 05/06/2021.

<sup>26</sup> ANDRIĆGRAD: Kusturica održao predavanje "Peter Handke – apostol istine", <https://opcija.net/andricgrad-kusturica-odrzao-predavanje-peter-handke-apostol-istine/>, accessed 07/06/2021.

<sup>27</sup> Salčinović, E., (2019) Dobiva li Peter Handke bistu u Srebrenici?, Oslobođenje, <https://www.oslobodjenje.ba/vijesti/bih/dobiva-li-peter-handke-bistu-u-srebrenici-499453>, accessed 10/06/2021.

“immeasurable merits in the struggle for justice and truth”, namely that he “disputed the Hague verdicts and denied genocide has occurred in Srebrenica.” Nationalists and revisionists feel emboldened and see the tide of history turning in their favour. The Nobel committee has fueled their ambitions.

Handke fanboys in the Austro-German intelligentsia remain blind to these political realities and then have the gall to slander diasporans as “clowns” and accuse them of “privatism” and “censorship”. This aggressive apologism is based on the myopic and racist idea that propagandizing for fascism and genocide is a-okay if it happens to a small country *elsewhere*. Because at home he’s still one of us. You see, they are the sole movers of History, while those Balkan people with their ancient hatreds don’t even get to work through the past. However, I’m not here to help them out of this inhuman lack of self-reflection, this particular idiocy.<sup>28</sup> My concern is our sanity and dignity, my concern is self-defence.<sup>29</sup>

As Aleksandar Hemon reminds us, “any survivor of genocide will tell you that disbelieving or dismissing their experience is a continuation of genocide. A genocide denier is an apologist for the next genocide.”<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Adorno., T, (1959), *The Meaning of Working Through the Past*, Communists in situ, <https://cominsitu.wordpress.com/2019/08/07/the-meaning-of-working-through-the-past-adorno-1959/>, accessed 04/06/2021.

<sup>29</sup> Index of Articles on Peter Handke’s Nobel Prize, Blogpost October 20, 2019, <https://medium.com/@adn/index-of-articles-on-peter-handkes-nobel-prize-515060442ca5>, accessed 04/06/2021.

<sup>30</sup> Hemon, A, (2019), *The Bob Dylan of Genocide Apologists*, The New York Times, Oct. 16, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/10/15/opinion/peter-handke-nobel-bosnia-genocide.html>, accessed 06/06/2021.

Genocide denial goes beyond the claim that *literally nothing happened*.<sup>31</sup> More often than not it comes in the form of *something happened but*. Its shifting strategies draw on a diverse arsenal of erasing, omitting, obscuring, distorting, minimizing, relativizing, decontextualizing, whatabouting, gaslighting, sealioning, bullshitting, dog-whistling, concern-trolling, victim-blaming and many other techniques. It does not seek to establish facts but to destabilize them. It purports to seek the truth but aims to create the opposite: an ambience of uncertainty. The violence of genocide denial keeps the victims from mourning, healing and moving on. It is the continuation of Ratko Mladić's motto for the siege of Sarajevo – "Let's blow their minds, so they cannot sleep" – by other means.

Handke certainly is a masterful practitioner of this art. He poeticizes nearly every denialist technique under the sun, to distract from the well-established truths about what happened in the Yugoslav Wars. And deliberately so. What Sartre said about antisemites also holds for genocide deniers, and perhaps conspiracism in general:<sup>32</sup>

"Never believe that anti-Semites are completely unaware of the absurdity of their replies. They know that their remarks are frivolous, open to challenge. But they are amusing themselves, for it is their adversary who is obliged to use words responsibly, since he believes in words."

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<sup>31</sup> Charny W., I., (2012) *A Classification of Denials of the Holocaust and Other Genocides*,: <http://www.ihgilm.com/a-classification-of-denials-of-the-holocaust-and-other-genocides-updated-2012/>, accessed 06/06/2021.

<sup>32</sup> Sartre, J.-P., (1948) *Anti-Semite and Jew*. Translated by G.J.Becker., [http://abahlali.org/files/Jean-Paul\\_Sartre\\_Anti-Semite\\_and\\_Jew\\_An\\_Exploration\\_of\\_the\\_Etiology\\_of\\_Hate\\_\\_1995.pdf](http://abahlali.org/files/Jean-Paul_Sartre_Anti-Semite_and_Jew_An_Exploration_of_the_Etiology_of_Hate__1995.pdf)

In *A Journey to the Rivers*, Handke suggests “the detour of recording certain trivialities” is more important for peace and reconciliation than “the evil facts.” In other words, Peter Handke’s poetry is more important than justice for the murdered and closure for the bereaved. “Get over it” is what the perpetrators say. It is not for nothing that denial is regarded as intrinsic to the genocidal process. First, you kill them, then you erase their memory and ‘blow the minds’ of the survivors.

In post-war Germany, Theodor Adorno, more than anyone else, understood just how devastating the destruction of memory is: “The murdered are to be cheated out of the single remaining thing that our powerlessness can offer them: remembrance.”<sup>33</sup> He also famously said that “to write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric.”<sup>34</sup> Well, for Handke, even writing poetry against the memory of the Bosnian genocide is not barbaric enough. He actively participates in its erasure on site. For instance, in 1998, he stayed at the Vilina Vlas<sup>35</sup> hotel in Višegrad, which during the war was the site of *genocidal rape*.<sup>36</sup> This was already a widely reported fact when Handke previously visited the town

<sup>33</sup> Adornom T., (1959), *The Meaning of Working Through the Past*, COMMUNISTS IN SITU, <https://cominsitu.wordpress.com/2019/08/07/the-meaning-of-working-through-the-past-adorno-1959/>, accessed 06/06/2021.

<sup>34</sup> Nosthoff, A., V., (2014) *Barbarism: Notes on the Thought of Theodor W. Adorno*, CRITICAL LEGAL THINKING <http://criticallegalthinking.com/2014/10/15/barbarism-notes-thought-theodor-w-adorno/>, accessed 10/06/2021.

<sup>35</sup> Maass, P., *The Nobel Prize, a Rape Camp in Bosnia, and Peter Handke*, The Intercept, <https://theintercept.com/2019/11/28/peter-handke-nobel-prize-bosnia-rape-hotel/>, accessed 06/06/2021.

<sup>36</sup> Beverly, A., (1996) *Rape Warfare The Hidden Genocide in Bosnia-Herzegovina and Croatia*, <https://www.upress.umn.edu/book-distribution/books/rape-warfare>, accessed 04/06/2021.

in 1996. And yet, in his account of the journey, he casts doubt on the crimes that had occurred in Višegrad. Of the 200 girls and women detained and sexually abused at Vilina Vlas, only a handful survived.<sup>37</sup> The remains of most of the victims were uncovered only in 2010.<sup>38</sup> Their memory continues to be erased in Višegrad today, while monuments<sup>39</sup> for the perpetrators are being built there. Handke's travel to Srebrenica and Višegrad, where he was courted by the nationalist post-genocide authorities, goes beyond denial: it is *genocide triumphalism*.<sup>40</sup> While the preparations for the first ICTY exhumation of the Srebrenica victims were underway, Handke was palling around and drinking with Karadžić loyalists (including war crime suspects) in the vicinity of the mass graves. Wallah, It would take a PhD thesis to thoroughly analyze all of his 'detours.'

The point about an apologist for the genocide of Muslims in Europe winning the Nobel Prize is not that it's shocking, contradictory or un-European. The point is that it's all too European. The way Handke gives wings to Greater Serbia motifs is little more than a highbrow

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<sup>37</sup> Amhentašević, N., Jelačić, N., Boračić, S., (2006) *Investigation: Visegrad rape victims say their crie go unherd*, Balkan Investigative Reporting Network, <https://web.archive.org/web/20090618031047/http://www.bim.ba/en/32/10/1312>, accessed 04/06/2021.

<sup>38</sup> Karčić, H., (2017), *Uncovering the Truth: The Lake Perućac Exhumations in Eastern Bosnia*, Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs Volume 37, <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/13602004.2017.1294374>, accessed 04/06/2021.

<sup>39</sup> Kovačević, D., (2017) *Bosnian Serbs Unveil Monument to Russian War Volunteers*, Balkan Transitional Justice, <https://balkaninsight.com/2017/04/12/bosnian-serbs-unveil-monument-to-russian-war-volunteers-04-12-2017/>, accessed 04/06/2021.

<sup>40</sup> Aljazeera, *What are the 10 stages of genocide?* <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/europe/2019/07/10-stages-genocide-190710112516344.html>, accessed 05/06/2021.

version of how the Fascist International imagines the Balkans.<sup>41</sup> Srebrenica survivor Emir Suljagić<sup>42</sup> gets to the heart of it: “To award him the Nobel Prize in literature is to retroactively award Radovan Karadžić for being the first to imagine Europe without Muslims.” The anti-Albanian racism that permeates some of Handke’s late works would have frequently translated into prosaic fear-mongering about ‘gang mentality’ and ‘Muslim hordes’ if coming from the pen of a lesser stylist. Whereas his jeering at Bosnian poets with a gibberish ‘Muslim-sounding’ name (“some Ali Muhmets“)<sup>43</sup> and callous contempt for the Mothers of Srebrenica – both in his *art* (*Die Tablas von Daimiel*) and as an *artist* (“I don’t believe a word they say, I don’t buy into their grief.”)<sup>44</sup> – is the kind of open racism Muslims in Europe are subject to all the time. Moreover, Handke’s resentment of Muslim women continues in his fiction. At one point in his most recent novel *Die Obstdiebin* (*The Fruit Thief*), the narrator encounters veiled women on a train. He stares at them for pages but fails to see them as fully human. They irritate him, the situation leaves him angered. His male gaze is reminiscent of Frantz Fanon’s study of the psychol-

<sup>41</sup> Delalić, A., *The Balkans in Rightwing Mythology*, Antidotezine, Blogpost 10/06/2019, <https://antidotezine.com/2019/06/10/the-balkans-in-rightwing-mythology/>, accessed 04/06/2021.

<sup>42</sup> The writer is a survivor of Srebrenica, (2019) *Handke’s Nobel Prize: Cauterizing Muslims from Europe’s history*, Daily Sabah, <https://www.dailysabah.com/op-ed/2019/10/19/handkes-nobel-prize-cauterizing-muslims-from-europes-history>, accessed 04/06/2021.

<sup>43</sup> Von Peter Von Becker (1999), *Die Juden sind außer Kategorie, Der Tagesspiegel*, <https://www.tagesspiegel.de/kultur/die-juden-sind-ausser-kategorie/73240.html>, accessed 04/06/2021.

<sup>44</sup> Preljević, V., (2019) *Wiederholungstäter Handke*, Der Standard, <https://www.derstandard.de/story/2000110471923/wiederholungstaeter-handke>, accessed 04/06/2021.

ogy of French colonialism in Algeria: “This woman who sees without being seen frustrates the colonizer.”<sup>45</sup>

Speaking of France, it’s worth noting that Handke has a connection to the *Nouvelle Droite*.<sup>46</sup> In 1996, he gave an interview to his safari companion<sup>47</sup> Thomas Deichmann of *ITN vs Living Marxism*<sup>48</sup> fame, where he calls the media a “Fourth Reich.” The English translation<sup>49</sup> was published in, you guessed it, *Living Marxism*<sup>50</sup> – arguably the most notorious platform for Bosnian genocide denial. After losing the libel case against ITN, *Living Marxism* re-branded as *Spiked* and has steadily become more right-wing over the years. The French translation<sup>51</sup> of the interview was published in *Éléments*, a magazine edited by Alain de Benoist – one of the most influential<sup>52</sup> fascist

<sup>45</sup> Fanon F. (1965), *A Dying Colonialism*, Grove Press, <http://abahlali.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/04/Frantz-Fanon-A-Dying-Colonialism.pdf>

<sup>46</sup> Nouvelle Droite, Wikipedia, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nouvelle\\_Droite](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nouvelle_Droite), accessed 06/06/2021.

<sup>47</sup> Handke, P.(1996), *A winter trip to the rivers Danube, Save, Morawa and Drina or Justice for Serbia*, Shurkamp, Frankfurt am Main, <https://handkeonline.onb.ac.at/node/1287>, accessed 07/06/2021.

<sup>48</sup> Campbell, D. (2002) Atrocity, memory, photography: Imaging the concentration camps of Bosnia--the case of ITN versus Living Marxism , Part 1, *Journal of Human Rights*, 1:1, 1-33, DOI: 10.1080/14754830110111544

<sup>49</sup> The original, full version of the interview was published in *Novo*, No22 May/June 1996, [http://web.archive.org/web/20010521175837/www.informinc.co.uk/LM/LM91/LM91\\_Handke.html](http://web.archive.org/web/20010521175837/www.informinc.co.uk/LM/LM91/LM91_Handke.html), accessed 06/06/2021.

<sup>50</sup> Living Marxism, WikiZer, [https://www.wikizero.com/en/Living\\_Marxism](https://www.wikizero.com/en/Living_Marxism), accessed 10/06/2021.

<sup>51</sup> Hintz, P., (2019), *Flâneur am rechten Rand*, <https://www.54books.de/flaneur-am-rechten-rand/>, accessed 06/06/2021.

<sup>52</sup> Chatterton Williams, T.,(2017) *The French Origins of “You Will Not Replace Us”*, *The New Yorker*, <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2017/12/04/the-french-origins-of-you-will-not-replace-us>, accessed 06/06/2021.

intellectuals of our time. Then in 1999, Handke signed an ‘anti-war’ petition started by de Benoist.

This reframing of his pro-Milošević stance as opposition to war is indicative of how the theorizing of this ideological godfather of the New Right often operates. De Benoist’s syncretic approach seeks to blur the line between the seemingly emancipatory and the outright fascist (just like Limonov’s). He proposes, for instance, ‘right-wing readings’ of Marx<sup>53</sup> and Marxian theorists like Antonio Gramsci<sup>54</sup> and Moishe Postone.<sup>55</sup> De Benoist likes to hide his fascism behind ‘concern’ for the Third World, opposition to US Empire<sup>56</sup> and euphemisms such as *ethnopluralism*.<sup>57</sup> Unwittingly or not, Handke’s politics essentially follow the same pattern. His apologists cite pacifism, media critique, opposition to imperialism, “justice for Serbia” and what-not as his impetus. And yet, this only ever translates into ethnic essentialism, nationalism (“one relating to a nation that is *elsewhere*”),<sup>58</sup> Islamophobia and denial of, and thus support for, genocide.

<sup>53</sup> Kaiser, B., De Benoist, A., Fusaro, D., (2018) *Marx from the right* <https://www.swr.de/swr2/literatur/Benedikt-Kaiser-Alain-de-Benoist-Diego-Fusaro-Marx-von-rechts,aexavarticle-swr-54762.html>, accessed 06/06/2021.

<sup>54</sup> Tamir Bar-on, (2016) *Where Have All The Fascists Gone?*, Taylor & Francis, <https://books.google.de/books?id=N5KoDQAAQBAJ>, accessed 10/06/2021.

<sup>55</sup> Trenkle, N., (2019) *Die Kopfgeburten des Herrn Alain de Benoist*, <http://www.krisis.org/2019/die-kopfgeburten-des-herrn-de-benoist/>, accessed 06/06/2021.

<sup>56</sup> Schlembach, R., (2014) *Against Old Europe*, <https://www.taylorfrancis.com/books/9781315566153/chapters/10.4324/9781315566153-9>, accessed 10/06/2021.

<sup>57</sup> Ethnopluralism, Wikipedia, <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ethnopluralism>, accessed 04/06/2021.

<sup>58</sup> On Dogmatism and Denial, <https://antidotezine.com/2018/03/22/on-dogmatism-and-denial/>, accessed 07/06/2021.

In the martial mythology of contemporary fascists, revanchist nostalgia for struggles against the Ottoman Empire, slandering Muslims as “jihadists”, the portrayal of refugee movements as an “invasion” and slogans like “Stop the Great Replacement!” are all commonplace. No doubt then that Handke’s casual genocide denial in *Die Tablas von Daimiel* (The Tablas de Daimiel), where he calls the victims of Srebrenica “Muslim soldiers”,<sup>59</sup> would excite many an alt-right crusader. In a remarkably blunt 2011 interview with the obscure red-brown<sup>60</sup> magazine *Ketzerbriefe*,<sup>61</sup> which was conducted by notorious genocide deniers, Handke speculates that only 2,000 to 4,000 people were murdered at Srebrenica. A monstrous example of the cheapest trick in the denialist book: baseless, contrarian chatter. In this interview, he also says he gave the 40,000 Deutsche Mark he made with book readings of *A Journey to the Rivers* to the post-genocide mayor of Srebrenica – Karadžić’s man. Handke even materially supports the erasure of the Bosnian genocide.

Of somewhat greater, more ‘Nobel-worthy’ artistry is the passage in *Die Kuckucke von Velika Hoča* (The Cuckoos of Velika Hoča) where he indirectly references

<sup>59</sup> Korsika, A., (2013) *On Dogmatism and Denial*, Antidote Zine, <https://www.cicero.de/kultur/exklusiv-die-tablas-von-daimiel/45152>, accessed 07/06/2021.

<sup>60</sup> An Investigation Into Red-Brown Alliances: Third Positionism, Russia, Ukraine, Syria, And The Western Left (2017), <https://libcom.org/library/investigation-red-brown-alliances-third-positionism-russia-ukraine-syria-western-left>, accessed 10/06/2021.

<sup>61</sup> Bremer, A. (2019), *Die Spur des Irrläufers, Perlentaucher* – Online Kulturmagazin mit Presseschau, Rezensionen, Feuilleton, <https://www.perlentaucher.de/essay/peter-handke-und-seine-relativierung-von-srebrenica-in-einer-extremistischen-postille.html>, accessed 06/06/2021.

the *SANU Memorandum*<sup>62</sup> of 1986, a milestone of Serb nationalism. He propagates its myth that Kosovo Albanians are secretly plotting to commit genocide against Serbs. Hence, violence against them is preemptive and justified self-defence. According to the memorandum, the high birth rate of the (predominantly Muslim) Kosovo Albanians is a central component of their “indirect genocide” (Anders Breivik).<sup>63</sup> This *demographic jihad* trope was used by Ratko Mladić to justify his crimes in Bosnia. He spoke of the Islamic world’s “demographic bomb.”

Handke’s most ingenious reinvention of Greater Serbia motifs can arguably be found in *Sommerlicher Nachtrag zu einer winterlichen Reise* (A Summer Addendum to a Winter’s Journey). There, he compares Karadžić’s besiegers of Sarajevo to Native Americans. In his view, both are freedom fighters up on the hill, fighting foreign invaders down in the valley. Both are being demonized as the aggressors in Western media and Western movies, respectively. In other words, Handke equates the real colonization of North America with the ‘anti-imperialist’ conspiracy theory that the Yugoslav Wars were all about a US-led plot against former NYC<sup>64</sup> banker, Kissinger buddy and neoliberal<sup>65</sup> reformist Slobodan Milošević and his proxies. An-

<sup>62</sup> SANU Memorandum, WikiZer, [https://www.wikizero.com/en/SANU\\_Memorandum](https://www.wikizero.com/en/SANU_Memorandum), accessed 05/06/2021.

<sup>63</sup> *The Norway killings Breivik’s Balkan obsession*, The Economist, <https://www.economist.com/eastern-approaches/2011/07/25/breiviks-balkan-obsession>, accessed 05/06/2021.

<sup>64</sup> LeBor, A., (2012), *Milosevic: A Biography* Bloomsbury Publishing, <https://books.google.de/books?id=emfbmGIPSi4C>, accessed 06/06/2021.

<sup>65</sup> Karadjis, M., *The Yugoslav Tragedy, A Marxist view, Bosnia, Kosovo & West*, Resistance Book Sydney, <https://books.google.de/bo>

other celebrity genocide denier<sup>66</sup> and proponent of this ‘theory’ spells out the logic: “Serbia is one of those disorderly miscreants that impedes the institution of the US-dominated global system.” The culture of Bosnian genocide denial in the West (the hardcore variety, at least) is typically constituted by the syncretism of far-right and far-left ideologies in service of Islamophobia and genocide. However, these ideas don’t only end up on neo-Nazi platforms like *Stormfront*. The same conspiracy theory<sup>67</sup> that convinced some Nobel jurors to award Handke despite his support for Greater Serbia is, for instance, propagated by the ‘leading voice of the American left’, *Jacobin Magazine*.<sup>68</sup>

Essentially the same idea as Handke’s spin on ‘Cowboys and Indians’ appears in the manifesto of the Christchurch killer. The self-styled “kebab removalist” and Karadžić fan Brenton Tarrant calls Kosovo Albanians “Islamic occupiers” and bemoans the West’s failure to resolutely support the Serb nationalist ‘freedom fighters’. This is brought full circle by

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oks?id=fEpOL35TxD0C&pg=PA40&lp=PA40&dq=%22Milo%C5%A1evi%C4%87+Commission%22&source=bl&ots=oKkf42-Te7&sig=ACfU3U0hUqoLGvE\_UtPq9Dk1j4nRpFriXQ&hl=de&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwiOgdbu2fHlAhXKGewKHeiVCnsQ6AEwE3oECAsQAQ#v=onepage&q=%22Milo%C5%A1evi%C4%87%20Commission%22&f=false, accessed 05/06/2021.

<sup>66</sup> Hudis, P., (2005) *Chomsky ignores lessons of wars on Kosovo*, <https://libcom.org/library/chomsky-kosovo-marxist-humanism>, accessed 05/06/2021.

<sup>67</sup> Maass, P. (2019), *Peter Handke won The Nobel Prize after two jurors fell for a Conspiracy Theory about the Bosnia War*, *The Intercept*, <https://theintercept.com/2019/11/14/peter-handke-nobel-prize-bosnian-genocide-conspiracy/> accessed 04/06/2021.

<sup>68</sup> Gibbs, D., (2015) *The Srebrenica Precedent*, <https://www.jacobin-mag.com/2015/07/bosnian-war-nato-bombing-dayton-accords/>, accessed 05/06/2021

the fact that Handke was a groomsman<sup>69</sup> for Novislav Đajić's wedding – the accordion player from the far-right Remove Kebab<sup>70</sup> meme, aka *Dat Face Soldier*. A war criminal<sup>71</sup> who was sentenced in 1997. Đajić is one of the protagonists in Handke's 1999 play *Die Fahrt im Einbaum oder Das Stück zum Film vom Krieg* (Voyage by Dugout or The Play of the Film of the War), where the Yugoslav Wars are portrayed as a globalist conspiracy against Serbia and *Dat Face Soldier* is found not guilty. Øyvind Berg analysed the play in 2014 on the occasion of Handke winning the Ibsen Award:<sup>72</sup>

“The point of view in the play is easily recognizable as that of the Chetniks (Serb fascists) and the author himself shows up under the nickname “The Greek.” It's known that Maldić's forces took Srebrenica with the help of Greek Volunteers and before the massacre, two flags were raised over the town, a Serb one and a Greek one.”

In *Rund um das Große Tribunal* (Around the Grand Tribunal) from 2003, Handke goes on for pages about his “friend” Đajić's innocence and even quotes at length from an unpublished text written by *Dat Face Soldier* to promote the war criminal's point of view on the crime he had committed. But separate the art from the artist, right?

<sup>69</sup> Trauzeuge beim Irrläufer, DIE ZEIT, 46/1999 [https://www.zeit.de/1999/46/Trauzeuge\\_beim\\_Irrlaeufer](https://www.zeit.de/1999/46/Trauzeuge_beim_Irrlaeufer), accessed 05/06/2021.

<sup>70</sup> Apropaganda music video- Serbia Strong / Remove Kebab (1992) <https://knowyourmeme.com/memes/serbia-strong-remove-kebab>, accessed 05/06/2021.

<sup>71</sup> Novislav Djajic case, Bavarian Higher Regional Court, 23 May 1997, <https://ihl-databases.icrc.org/applic/ihl/ihl-nat.nsf/0/3EA892A1FB670B46412565FC00394EA5>

<sup>72</sup> *What's Wrong With Handke?* (2014), BIH News Platform, <https://bosniannewsplatform.wordpress.com/2014/12/20/whats-wrong-with-handke>, accessed 05/06/2021

Handke's disturbing appropriation of Native American struggles serves to embellish an old Greater Serbia idea. In Serb ethno-nationalist mythology, Slavic Muslims are seen as race traitors. They represent the separation of Slavdom from Western civilization and embody the Ottoman domination over the Serbs. The existence of these *Christ-killers*<sup>73</sup> (and, by extension, also Albanian Muslims), as well as their collaborators among the Serbs (i.e. non-nationalist Serbs), is what stands in the way of the resurrection of a purified ethnos. In this view, Serbs are *indigenous*, while Bosnians<sup>74</sup> – and in particular Bosniaks – are rootless agents of outside forces and contaminated with the Orient, i.e. not an authentic *Volk*.<sup>75</sup> In the 1990s, Bosnians were once again rumoured to be inviting in foreign powers, above all the *USA*, which reinforced the notion that they are, indeed, traitors deserving of elimination. Thus, Handke conceptualizes the crimes of Višegrad, Sarajevo and Srebrenica in essence as a twofold liberation struggle: against the Islamic yoke of olden times and the globalist yoke of today. Sure, every now and then he would vaguely admit that something 'ugly' had happened, but he's not able to actually condemn these horrors. He can't conceive of Đajić, Mladić, Karadžić and Milošević as *really* guilty. For him, they are tragic figures caught up in forces beyond their control: history, modernity,

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<sup>73</sup> A. Sells, M., (1998) *The Bridge Betrayed Religion and Genocide in Bosnia*, University of California Press. <https://www.ucpress.edu/book/9780520216624/the-bridge-betrayed>, accessed 05/06/2021.

<sup>74</sup> Magaš, B., (2003), *On Bosnianness, Nations and Nationalism* 9(1). <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1111/1469-8219.00072>, accessed 05/06/2021

<sup>75</sup> Völkisch movement, [https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/V%C3%B6lkisch\\_movement](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/V%C3%B6lkisch_movement), accessed 05/06/2021.

imperialism, globalization, Islamization and so on. As Karahasan notes, Handke collectivizes moral concepts like culpability and justice. It is he who transfers the responsibility for crimes committed by concrete individuals – Đajić, Mladić, Karadžić, Milošević etc. – to ‘the Serbs’ as such, and then grandstands as ‘their’ defender. “Such Serbs exist only in Handke’s and Milošević’s head,” concludes Karahasan.

The cult of ethnic purity in Serb nationalist ideology very much appeals to fascists in the West, whose own *blood and soil* revival draws heavily on de Benoist’s theoretical work. What they see in the Greater Serbia project of the 1990s is the realization of their own cause: a fundamental reordering of space along archaic ethnic dividing lines, against Islam, multiculturalism and globalism. Götz Kubitschek, one of the key thinkers of contemporary fascism in Germany, considers Handke’s ‘Justice for Serbia’ pamphlets part of the right-wing literary canon. Kubitschek himself witnessed post-war Bosnia as a volunteer for the peacekeeping force SFOR. This experience helped to shape his ethnocentric worldview. The book he wrote about his time in Bosnia, *Raki am Igman* (Raki at the Igman), may not be propagandistic kitsch, but the comparison to Handke’s ‘travelogues’ nevertheless suggests itself, at least politically.

The Nobel Laureate’s fascination with the Greater Serbia ideology rhymes with his tendency to essentialize ethnic identities. In a particularly revealing passage in *Unter Tränen fragend* (Asking through the Tears), Handke describes watching Milošević regime propaganda on TV during the NATO bombing campaign in 1999. He affirms it as “naturgewachsen” (naturally-grown) and marvels at Serbia’s “oldest and most

traditional dances” and “most beautiful folk costumes.” In his quest for primordial authenticity,<sup>76</sup> Handke homogenizes ‘the Serbs’ (“Serbenvolk”), fetishizes them as *noble savages* and considers himself their saviour. However, when he speaks of ‘Serbia’ and ‘the Serbs’, what he usually means is Serb nationalism.<sup>77</sup>

In late 1996, Handke met with Jovan Divjak in Sarajevo.<sup>78</sup> The meeting was arranged by Valentin Inzko, then the Austrian ambassador to Bosnia-Herzegovina. As a Bosnian Army general, Divjak had defended his city<sup>79</sup> against the Serb nationalist siege, which made him a Sarajevo legend. Handke asked him why he – as an ethnic Serb – remained in a Muslim army. Divjak explained to him that it’s an army of Serbs, Croats, Muslims and all other citizens. It was his professional duty to side with the citizens against the onslaught. Divjak told him about the Markale massacres<sup>80</sup> and the more than one thousand chil-

<sup>76</sup> Adorno., T. W., ( 1973) *The Jargon of Authenticity*, Northwestern Univ Press, [https://books.google.de/books/about/The\\_Jargon\\_of\\_Authenticity.html?id=5wIVDwD9pykC&redir\\_esc=y](https://books.google.de/books/about/The_Jargon_of_Authenticity.html?id=5wIVDwD9pykC&redir_esc=y), accessed 05/06/2021.

<sup>77</sup> Prljevic, V.,(2019) *Handkes Serbien*, Perlentaucher – Online Kulturmagazin mit Presseschau, Rezensionen, Feuilleton, <https://www.perlentaucher.de/essay/handkes-serbien.html>, accessed 10/06/2021.

<sup>78</sup> Nobelpreisdebatte, *Peter Handke und die Mär vom Rachemassaker* (2019), Der Standard <https://www.derstandard.de/story/2000110626189/peter-handke-und-die-maer-vom-rachemassaker>, accessed 10/06/2021.

<sup>79</sup> Sarajevo my Love (2013), The story of Jovan Divjak, an ethnic Serb who defended Sarajevo against Serb forces during the Bosnian war. Al Jazeera World, <https://www.aljazeera.com/programmes/aljazeeraworld/2013/06/201361091927868566.html>, accessed 10/06/2021.

<sup>80</sup> Markale massacres, Wikipedia, [https://www.wikipedia.org/wiki/Markale\\_massacres](https://www.wikipedia.org/wiki/Markale_massacres), accessed 04/06/2021

dren that were killed during the siege. He also told him that Handke's books too were burned in the destruction of Vijećnica.<sup>81</sup> In August 1992, the Army of Republika Srpska<sup>82</sup> targeted and set ablaze the neo-Moorish edifice which housed the National and University Library. Karadžić's men sought to annihilate the cultural heritage of Bosnia-Herzegovina.<sup>83</sup> In this *memoricide*,<sup>84</sup> millions of books, historical documents and unique manuscripts were destroyed. As a public intellectual in the German-speaking world, Handke surely must be aware of Adorno's description of the obliteration of memory as *the devil's innermost principle*. In Divjak's recollection,<sup>85</sup> though, he seemed uninterested and unmoved by what he had been told. Shortly before their conversation, Handke visited Karadžić in Pale, who was already

<sup>81</sup> Bosnia's cultural symbol reopens in Sarajevo, Al Jazeera English youtube video, May 9, 2014, <https://youtu.be/8JU3z1YHCSc>, accessed 06/06/2021.

<sup>82</sup> Republika Srpska, WikiZer, [https://www.wikizero.com/en/Republika\\_Srpska](https://www.wikizero.com/en/Republika_Srpska), accessed 06/06/2021

<sup>83</sup> Walasek, H., *The ICTY and the prosecution of crimes against cultural and religious property*, <https://heritage.sense-agency.com/>, accessed 06/06/2021.

<sup>84</sup> Halilović, H., (2013), *Places of Pain: Forced Displacement, Popular Memory and Trans-local Identities in Bosnian War-torn Communities*, Berghahn Books, [https://books.google.de/books?id=6VIFAAAQBAj&pg=PA103&lpg=PA103&dq=vije%C4%87nica+memoricide&source=bl&ots=XXdayIBWDw&sig=ACfU3U2Um9I3UKCcbajHOp7bxgeP4KxbGg&hl=de&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEWiatenMvf\\_lAhXCoFwKHQjJDPMQ6AEwAXoECAgQAQ#v=onepage&q=vije%C4%87nica%20memoricide&f=false](https://books.google.de/books?id=6VIFAAAQBAj&pg=PA103&lpg=PA103&dq=vije%C4%87nica+memoricide&source=bl&ots=XXdayIBWDw&sig=ACfU3U2Um9I3UKCcbajHOp7bxgeP4KxbGg&hl=de&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEWiatenMvf_lAhXCoFwKHQjJDPMQ6AEwAXoECAgQAQ#v=onepage&q=vije%C4%87nica%20memoricide&f=false), accessed 06/06/2021.

<sup>85</sup> Brezo, B., (2019), Presedan Nobelovog komiteta kojem se nadaju žrtve genocida, n1 info, <http://ba.n1info.com/Vijesti/a388845/Protest-Majki-zbog-nagrade-Handkeu.html>, accessed 10/06/2021.

wanted for genocide and crimes against humanity. The two poets<sup>86</sup> drank Šljivovica and exchanged books.

Denialism is at the core of the Greater Serbia ideology. The irredentist claim made by Serb nationalists, that Bosnia is not a ‘real’ (ethnically-defined) country with a distinct history, culture and society but in fact a ‘lost’ territory of Greater Serbia, serves to legitimize its destruction. Bosnia’s disappearance is seen as necessary for the establishment of a purified ethnostate. The ahistorical *denial of Bosnia*<sup>87</sup> is intertwined with the denial of Bosniaks as a people. This dehumanization sets them “outside the boundaries of nation, race, and people”<sup>88</sup> and ultimately serves to deny (that is, to justify) genocide against them, both before and after the fact. If Bosniaks are a non-people (or just a spectre of ‘the Turks’ or actually Serbs-in-denial), you may be able to kill, displace, ‘cleanse’ or ‘take revenge’ on them randomly, but you can’t target them systematically on the basis of ethnicity – you can’t commit

<sup>86</sup> Mc. Rabie, H., (2014), *What should we do about Radovan Karadžić’s poetry?*, Open democracy <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/5050/what-should-we-do-about-radovan-karadzics-poetry/>, accessed 06/06/2021.

<sup>87</sup> Mahmutćehajić, R.,(2000),*The Denial of Bosnia*, Penn State University Press, <http://www.psupress.org/books/titles/0-271-02030-x.html>, accessed 06/06/2021.

<sup>88</sup> Sells, M., A., *The Bridge Betrayed: Religion and Genocide in Bosnia*, University of California Press, [https://books.google.de/books?id=0bcwDwAAQBAJ&pg=PA51&lpg=PA51&dq=%22sets+the+Slavic+Muslims+outside+the+boundaries+of+nation,+race,+and+people%22&source=bl&ots=1z43aQDh-E4&sig=ACfU3U0GoQ7Hv2ljHo\\_dUynEbRLk8UCJRw&hl=d&sa=X&ved=2ahUKÉwiF2rXD24XmAhWHsKQKHSDwBOAQ6AEwAAnoECAkQAQ#v=onepage&q=%22sets%20the%20Slavic%20Muslims%20outside%20the%20boundaries%20of%20nation%2C%20race%2C%20and%20people%22&f=false](https://books.google.de/books?id=0bcwDwAAQBAJ&pg=PA51&lpg=PA51&dq=%22sets+the+Slavic+Muslims+outside+the+boundaries+of+nation,+race,+and+people%22&source=bl&ots=1z43aQDh-E4&sig=ACfU3U0GoQ7Hv2ljHo_dUynEbRLk8UCJRw&hl=d&sa=X&ved=2ahUKÉwiF2rXD24XmAhWHsKQKHSDwBOAQ6AEwAAnoECAkQAQ#v=onepage&q=%22sets%20the%20Slavic%20Muslims%20outside%20the%20boundaries%20of%20nation%2C%20race%2C%20and%20people%22&f=false), accessed 06/06/2021.

genocide against them. Handke propagates this idea in a recent, post-Nobel interview as well as in *A Journey to the Rivers*, written a few months after the Srebrenica genocide: “[...] if the Serbo-Croatian-speaking Muslim descendants of Serbs in Bosnia are in fact a people.”<sup>89</sup> The original German version<sup>90</sup> contains an extra layer of mockery because he chose to call Bosniaks “Muselmanen” – an archaic, jocular term for Muslims as well a slang term<sup>91</sup> for irreversibly exhausted, emancipated and apathetic captives of Nazi concentration camps. Primo Levi described them as “the weak, the inept, those doomed to selection.”<sup>92</sup>

With all of this in mind, the meaning of another of Handke’s favourite tropes becomes clear. He likes to justify the Srebrenica genocide by painting it as an act of revenge. To this end, he evokes a mysterious “Vor-Geschichte” (pre-history). In order to deny the genocidal intent of the perpetrators, Handke points to earlier atrocities by the Bosnian Army (while omitting the broader genocidal context in Eastern Bosnia<sup>93</sup> since 1992). Moreover, this move doubles as a

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<sup>89</sup> Greinter, U., Spielen Sie jetzt Tribunal, interview with Peter Handke, Zeit Online <https://web.archive.org/web/20191120115940/https://www.zeit.de/2019/48/peter-handke-literaturnobelpreis-kritik-serbien-interview/komplettansicht>, accessed 06/06/2021.

<sup>90</sup> Peter Handkes Reisebericht “Gerechtigkeit für Serbien”: Teil I (2019), Süddeutsche Zeitung, <https://www.sueddeutsche.de/kultur/peter-handke-gerechtigkeit-fuer-serbien-reisereportage-reisebericht-1.4647433>, accessed 06/06/2021.

<sup>91</sup> Muselmann, Wikipedia, <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Muselmann>, accessed 06/06/2021.

<sup>92</sup> If This Is a Man, Wikipedia, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/If\\_This\\_Is\\_a\\_Man](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/If_This_Is_a_Man), accessed 06/06/2021

<sup>93</sup> Karčić, H., (2015), *Blueprint for genocide: the destruction of Muslims in Eastern Bosnia*, Open Democracy, <https://www.opendemocracy.org>.

dog-whistle for another *Vor-Geschichte* – the Ottoman domination over the Serbs. When Handke speaks of revenge, inevitably Ratko Mladić’s words from July 11, 1995, in Srebrenica come to mind: “The time has come to take revenge on the Turks in this region.”

Echoing his own words:<sup>94</sup> Peter Handke is a writer, he comes from Njegoš,<sup>95</sup> from D. Ćosić,<sup>96</sup> from Karadžić. Leave him in peace and don’t ask him questions like that.

Handke, who actually praised<sup>97</sup> the poetry<sup>98</sup> of Radovan Karadžić, is in many respects the poet of our times. His antisemitic abuse of the literary critic and Holocaust survivor Marcel Reich-Ranicki,<sup>99</sup> suspicion that George Soros,<sup>100</sup> among others, is re-

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net/en/can-europe-make-it/blueprint-for-genocide-destruction-of-muslims-in-eastern-bosnia/, accessed 06/06/2021.

<sup>94</sup> Oltermann, P., (2019) *Peter Handke hits out at criticism of Nobel win*, The Guardian, <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2019/oct/16/peter-handke-hits-out-at-criticism-of-nobel-win>, accessed 07/06/2021.

<sup>95</sup> The Mountain Wreath, Wikipedia, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The\\_Mountain\\_Wreath](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Mountain_Wreath), accessed 07/06/2021.

<sup>96</sup> Kellog., C., (2011) *The mysterious hoax Nobel Literature Prize website*, Los Angeles Times, <https://latimesblogs.latimes.com/jacketcopy/2011/10/the-hoax-nobel-literature-prize-website.html>, accessed 07/06/2021.

<sup>97</sup> ChristianSeiler.com, Peter Handke interview, <http://www.christianseiler.com/peter-handke.html>, accessed 08/06/2021.

<sup>98</sup> Roming, R., (2008), *Can Poetry Be a War Crime?*, The New Yorker, <https://www.newyorker.com/books/page-turner/can-poetry-be-a-war-crime>, accessed 06/06/2021.

<sup>99</sup> [http://m-reich-ranicki.de/index.php?content=http://m-reich-ranicki.de/content\\_themen\\_freundeFeinde.html](http://m-reich-ranicki.de/index.php?content=http://m-reich-ranicki.de/content_themen_freundeFeinde.html)

<sup>100</sup> Fetscher, C., (2019), *Debate about Peter Handke, Handke makes perpetrators into victims Der Tagesspiegel*, <https://www.tagesspiegel.de/kultur/debatte-um-peter-handke-handke-macht-taeter-zu-opfern/25142378.html>, accessed 08/06/2021.

sponsible for the “Welt-Krieg” (world-war) on Yugoslavia and chatter about “Soros democrats”;<sup>101</sup> his animus against the ‘lying press’;<sup>102</sup> his genocide tourism and triumphalism as a harbinger<sup>103</sup> of Western Assadism;<sup>104</sup> his humanizing of Adolf Hitler and sympathy for some “fascist violence”;<sup>105</sup> his domestic violence,<sup>106</sup> disdain for the #MeToo movement<sup>107</sup> and misogynistic abuse of the anti-Milošević

<sup>101</sup> A long farewell to Yugoslavia, In an interview with Martin Meyer and Andreas Breitenstein, Peter Handke discusses what happened in the break-up of the former Yugoslavia, (2006), <http://www.signandsight.com/features/819.html>, accessed 08/06/2021.

<sup>102</sup> Nesbit, D., (2016), *Donald Trump Supporters Are Using a Nazi Word to Attack Journalists*, Time, <https://time.com/4544562/donald-trump-supporters-lugenpresse/>, accessed 06/06/2021.

<sup>103</sup> Uğur Ümit Üngör, Narrative war is coming (2019), <https://www.aljazeera.net/en/content/narrative-war-coming>, accessed 04/06/2021.

<sup>104</sup> Idrees Ahmad, M, (2019) *Junket journalism in the shadow of genocide*, Al Jazeera, <https://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/junket-journalism-shadow-genocide-190914121639788.html>, accessed 10/06/2021.

<sup>105</sup> Visit to Peter Handke (1978), *André Müller, “Entblößungen”*, Goldmann, 1979, <http://elfriedejelinek.com/andremuller/peterhandke1978.html>, accessed 07/06/2021.

<sup>106</sup> Handke, P., (1999) *Den Bergschuh im Unterleib*, <https://www.spiegel.de/kultur/literatur/peter-handke-den-bergschuh-im-unterleib-a-24228.html>, accessed 10/06/2021.

<sup>107</sup> Bremer, A., (2019), *Handke und der Balkan – Nobelpreis in den falschen Händen*, DW.com, <https://www.dw.com/de/handke-und-der-balkan-nobelpreis-in-den-falschen-h%C3%A4nden/a-50794184>, accessed 07/06/2021.

dissident Biljana Srbljanović;<sup>108</sup> his Trumpesque vulgarity and “offending the audience” etc.<sup>109</sup>

In an open letter,<sup>110</sup> several associations of Bosnian wartime victims don’t beat around the bush: to award Peter Handke is to award fascism. Or as Edin Hajdarpašić remarked, “1990s Bosnia also taught the fundamental lesson of the twentieth century: No pasarán!”<sup>111</sup> Seemingly oblivious to this lesson is Henrik Petersen, member of the Nobel committee, who justified the decision as follows: “In 50 years... Peter Handke, just like Beckett, will be among the most obvious choices the Swedish Academy ever made, of that I am certain.”<sup>112</sup> Well, he’s got a point. Considering where “the world, the so-called world,” is heading, that’s a fairly obvious prediction. Or as pointed out by Jean Baudrillard,<sup>113</sup> the rare Western intellectual who understood the paradoxical role of the Bosnian

<sup>108</sup> Ich bin ein Idiot im griechischen Sinne (2007), Der Schriftsteller Peter Handke im Interview, <https://www.profil.at/home/ich-idiot-sinne-182406>, accessed 09/06/2021.

<sup>109</sup> Offending the Audience, Wikipedia, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Offending\\_the\\_Audience](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Offending_the_Audience), accessed 04/06/2021.

<sup>110</sup> Radio Sarajevo, Handke / Udruženja žrtava iz BiH uputila protestno pismo: Ovo je završna faza genocida!, <https://www.radio-sarajevo.ba/metromahala teme/udruzenja-zrtava-iz-bih-uputila-protestno-pismo-ovo-je-završna-faza-genocida/354984>, accessed 10/06/2021.

<sup>111</sup> Hajdarpašić, E., Twitter post Oct 26, 2019, [https://twitter.com/\\_edinh/status/1188063260525944838](https://twitter.com/_edinh/status/1188063260525944838), accessed 08/06/2021.

<sup>112</sup> Flood, A., (2019) Swedish Academy defends Peter Handke’s controversial Nobel win, <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2019/oct/21/swedish-academy-defends-peter-handkes-controversial-nobel-win>, accessed 08/06/2021.

<sup>113</sup> Baudrillard, J., FOUR No Pity for Sarajevo; *The West’s Serbiansation; When the West Stands In for the Dead*, in *This Time We Knew: Western Responses to Genocide in Bosnia* (1996), Meštrović. S., G., Cushman, T., NYU Press, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt9qfngn.7?>

genocide for the West: the Serb nationalists “are Europe’s cutting edge. The ‘real’ Europe in the making is a white Europe, a bleached Europe that is morally, economically, and ethnically integrated and cleansed.” This vision is unlikely to displease our Nobel Laureate for he locates the true Europe in Serbia and Republika Srpska. That is, his own imagined<sup>114</sup> Greater Serbia. The “purity” he finds there, he says,<sup>115</sup> is not “alive” in France or Germany.

The Nobel Prize in Literature is awarded to “the most outstanding work in an idealistic direction.”<sup>116</sup> The ideal, in this case, is the “painful but realistic restoration of Christian Europe.”<sup>117</sup> Handke’s is the poetry of *Remove Kebab*. It truly does represent this morally, spiritually indefensible civilization.<sup>118</sup> Congratulations on the well-deserved award.

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refreqid=excelsior%3A45e13fb4d419907d7a67877acdaf440&seq=1#metadata\_info\_tab\_contents, accessed 09/06/2021.

<sup>114</sup> Todorova, M., (2009) *Imagining the Balkan*, Oxford University Press, <https://global.oup.com/academic/product/imagining-the-balkans-9780195387865?cc=de&lang=en&>, accessed 10/06/2021.

<sup>115</sup> Dorđević, B., Peter Handke: *Čistota još diše u Srbiji*, Novosti RS, <http://www.novosti.rs/vesti/kultura.71.html:428592-Peter-Handke-Cistota-jos-dise-u-Srbiji>, accessed 09/06/2021.

<sup>116</sup> The will of Alfred Nobel from 27 November, 1895, <https://www.nobelprize.org/alfred-nobel/alfred-nobels-will/>, accessed 10/06/2021.

<sup>117</sup> Branch T. (2009), *Sharing Secrets In ‘The Clinton Tapes’*, NPR, <https://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=113269412>

<sup>118</sup> Césaire, A., (2000) *Discourse on Colonialism*, Montly Review Press, New York, [https://books.google.de/books?id=yaDL4O5MdiC&pg=PA32&dpq=PA32&dq=%22morally,+spiritually+indefensible%22&source=bl&ots=BADPpkYq2c&sig=ACfU3U2JAztE0JjFXror\\_FEXSjJFYXkfkQ&hl=de&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwjJnOa2qcTIAhWoM-wKHx1-CgUQ6AEwB3oECAyQBA#v=onepage&q=%22morally%2C%20spiritually%20indefensible%22&f=false](https://books.google.de/books?id=yaDL4O5MdiC&pg=PA32&dpq=PA32&dq=%22morally,+spiritually+indefensible%22&source=bl&ots=BADPpkYq2c&sig=ACfU3U2JAztE0JjFXror_FEXSjJFYXkfkQ&hl=de&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwjJnOa2qcTIAhWoM-wKHx1-CgUQ6AEwB3oECAyQBA#v=onepage&q=%22morally%2C%20spiritually%20indefensible%22&f=false), accessed 10/06/2021.

# Serb Authorities Want Tourists to Stay in a Hotel That Was Once a Rape Camp

EHLIMANA MEMIŠEVIĆ\*

ON JULY 5, 2020, the public broadcasting service of Bosnia and Herzegovina – Radio Television of Bosnia and Herzegovina – reported that the Tourist Board with the support of the municipality of Visegrad started a promotional tourist campaign with the slogan “We are waiting for you in Visegrad”. They also provided gift vouchers as a way to attract tourists. It is reported that hotel Visegrad, hotel Vilina Vlas and Andricgrad are participating in the campaign.

Hotel Vilina Vlas, was one of the infamous rape camps in 1992.<sup>1</sup> Though the incidents took place before the 1995 Srebrenica genocide, it is important on its anniver-

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<sup>1</sup> Emma Graham-Harrison, “Back on the tourist trail: the hotel where women were raped and tortured”, *The Guardian*, 28 January 2018; <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/jan/28/bosnia-hotel-rape-murder-war-crimes>, accessed: 20 July 2021.

sary to remember the dehumanisation that led us to that point, and how willing people are to forget the crimes.

It is suspected that at least 200 Bosnian girls and women were held at Vilina Vlas and systematically raped “in order to be inseminated by the Serb seed”<sup>2</sup> as one of the victims of rape from Visegrad was told by her rapist.

Visegrad is a small town in eastern Bosnia. In 1991, there were twenty-one thousand inhabitants. In what has come to be known as ethnic cleansing, which is an euphemism for genocide, Visegrad’s Bosnian Muslim population, a majority at the time (63 percent) was almost completely erased.

In a public spectacle, Bosnian civilians were brought on a mass scale to the famous Mehmed Pasa Sokolovic bridge, murdered and thrown into the Drina river.

The UNESCO World Heritage Site, Mehmed Pasa Sokolovic bridge, built in the 16th century by the Ottomans, which Nobel Award winner Ivo Andric wrote about in his book *The Bridge on the Drina*, was also used for the mass murder of Bosniaks in World War II. In October 1943 alone, around fifteen hundred Bosnians were killed at the bridge by Draza Mihailovic’s Chetniks.<sup>3</sup>

The killings on the bridge in 1992 were so massive that Visegrad police inspector Milan Josipovic, as reported by *Guardian* journalist, Ed Vulliamy, received “a macabre complaint from downriver, from the management of Bajina Basta hydro-electric plant across the Serbian border.”<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Edina Bećirević, *Genocide on the Drina River* (Yale University Press, 2014), p. 117

<sup>3</sup> Edina Bećirević, *Genocide on the Drina River*, p.124

<sup>4</sup> Ed Vulliamy, “Bloody Trail of Butchery at the Bridge”, *The Guardian*, 11 March 1996.

The plant's director requested to "slow the flow of corpses down the Drina," since they "were clogging up the culverts in his dam at such a rate that he could not assemble sufficient staff to remove them."<sup>5</sup>

Victims' bodies were hidden in mass graves,<sup>6</sup> sometimes burned in order to remove any evidence of the crime, and sometimes dug up again and transferred by trucks and mechanical diggers to several 'secondary' and even 'tertiary' mass graves. In many cases ravines, rivers and lake beds were used as mass graves.<sup>7</sup>

Besides killing people at the bridge in the spring and summer of 1992, Bosnian civilians were burned alive. On two distinct occasions, on 14 and 27 June 1992, more than 140 civilians, mostly women and children including a two-day-old infant, were locked in two houses in Pionirska Street and Bikavac which were then set ablaze.

The rape was part of a systematic, genocidal set of crimes committed with the aim of exterminating the Bosnian population as Edina Bećirević pointed out.<sup>8</sup>

One of the most infamous rape camps was the hotel Vilina Vlas,<sup>9</sup> located seven kilometres from town. The

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<sup>5</sup> Ed Vulliamy, "Bloody Trail of Butchery at the Bridge".

<sup>6</sup> Albina Sorguc, "Bosnia Discovers Wartime Mass Grave in Visegrad", *Balkan Insight*, 12 July 2019. <https://balkaninsight.com/2019/07/12/bosnia-discovers-wartime-mass-grave-in-visegrad/>, accessed: 20 July 2021.

<sup>7</sup> Hikmet Karčić, "Uncovering the Truth: The Lake Perućac Exhumations in Eastern Bosnia", *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs*, 37 (1), 2017, pp. 114-128, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13602004.2017.1294374>

<sup>8</sup> Edina Bećirević, *Genocide on the Drina River*, p. 117

<sup>9</sup> Peter Maass, "The Rapes in Bosnia: A Muslim Schoolgirl's Account", *The Washington Post*, 27 December 1992: <https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/1992/12/27/the-rapes-in-bosnia-a-muslim-schoolgirls-account/4c85d87f-18ea-4b1f-bc02-7b456e971a99/>, accessed: 20 July 2021.

Court of Bosnia and Herzegovina sentenced to sixteen years a member of the Republika Srpska police force, Zeljko Lelek, for crimes against humanity in Višegrad, including for the crime of rape.<sup>10</sup>

One of his victims of rape in Vilina Vlas was Jasmina Ahmetpahić, who ended her life (and further rape) by jumping out of the window of the Vilina Vlas hotel, after being raped for four days.<sup>11</sup>

In the process of the erasure of the memory, an important part of the ethnic cleansing, the Serbs who controlled Višegrad after the war reopened the Vilina Vlas as the spa hotel it used to be.

Foreign visitors were encouraged to stay. Kym Vercoe, an actress from Sydney, stayed in Vilina Vlas in summer 2008, after her Belgrade friends recommended her to visit Višegrad.<sup>12</sup>

After a sleepless night and learning that a hotel was one of the most infamous rape camps in 1992, upon her return to Australia she wrote a play *Seven Kilometres North East: Performance on Geography, Tourism and Crime*, which deals, “simultaneously, with the concepts of ignorance, geography, tourism and crime”.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Edina Bećirević, “Hotel Vilina Vlas, Višegrad – Then and Now, Commemorating Rape Victims”, *Spirit of Bosnia*, 07 (2), 2012. <http://www.spiritofbosnia.org/v7n2/hotel-vilina-vlas-visegrad-then-and-now-commemorating-rape-victims/>, accessed: 20 July 2021.

<sup>11</sup> Chris Hedges, “From One Serbian Militia Chief, A Trail of Plunder and Slaughter”, *The New York Times*, 25 March 1996. <https://www.nytimes.com/1996/03/25/world/from-one-serbian-militia-chief-a-trail-of-plunder-and-slaughter.html>, accessed: 20 July 2021.

<sup>12</sup> Cait Kelly, „The hotel where women were raped and tortured and men executed during the Bosnian war is STILL open for business“, *Daily Mail*, 28 February 2018, [https://www.dailymail.co.uk/travel/travel\\_news/article-5393841/Vilina-Vlas-hotel-used-rape-camp-Bosnian-war.html](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/travel/travel_news/article-5393841/Vilina-Vlas-hotel-used-rape-camp-Bosnian-war.html), accessed: 20 July 2021.

<sup>13</sup> Edina Bećirević, “Hotel Vilina Vlas, Višegrad”.

Apparently one of the guests was the Austrian writer, Peter Handke,<sup>14</sup> who received the Nobel Prize for the Literature for 2019. Handke, a Milosevic apologist<sup>15</sup> continuously denied genocide and the other atrocities committed by Serbs against Bosnians. He described Srebrenica as a “revenge massacre” for “earlier Muslim killings of Serbs” and in a manner of subtle denialism questioned the guilt and the role of Milan Lukic, by casting the doubt on already proven facts.<sup>16</sup>

Milan Lukic was sentenced by the International Criminal Tribunal for Yugoslavia to life in prison for war crimes including murder, cruelty, persecution and other crimes against humanity committed in Visegrad in 1992 and 1993.<sup>17</sup>

On the day when the survivors from Visegrad mourned the anniversary of the burning to death of around 140 people, the Public institution Rehabilitation Center ‘Vilina Vlas’ Visegrad announced that it was offering tourist vouchers for catering and health services.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Peter Maass, “The Nobel Prize, a Rape Camp in Bosnia, and Peter Handke”, *The Intercept*, 28 November 2019, <https://theintercept.com/2019/11/28/peter-handke-nobel-prize-bosnia-rape-hotel/>, accessed: 20 July 2021.

<sup>15</sup> Aleksandar Hemon, “The Bob Dylan of Genocide Apologists”, *The New York Times*, 15 October 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/10/15/opinion/peter-handke-nobel-bosnia-genocide.html>, accessed: 20 July 2021.

<sup>16</sup> Peter Maass, “How the Nobel Prize Succumbed to the Literary Art of Genocide Denial”, *The Intercept*, 26 October 2019, <https://theintercept.com/2019/10/26/nobel-prize-literature-peter-handke-genocide/?comments=1>, accessed: 20 July 2021.

<sup>17</sup> Judgement, *Prosecutor v. Milan Lukić, Sredoje Lukić*, IT-98-32/1-T (20 July 2009)

<sup>18</sup> <https://vilinavlas.com/promo/turisticki-vauceri/>, accessed: 20 July 2021.

A tourist voucher is a document issued by the Ministry of Trade and Tourism of Republika Srpska based on which the user of the voucher is entitled to a subsidy.

“We want to use digital promotional tools to show tourists from Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia that they can come and spend a few days in Visegrad, because it is a destination where they will have the most diverse tourist facilities,” it said.

Dusana Bukvic, the director of the Rehabilitation Center Vilina Vlas said: “The promotional campaign ‘We are waiting for you in Visegrad’ is a great opportunity to attract more tourists to our region and we supported the idea and gave our facilities as a prize. Thus we want to show that we have something to offer and expect all who come to come back and bring new guests.”

The fact that the rape camp is advertised as a place for rehabilitation, that the government of the Republika Srpska is subsidising people’s accomodation and the fact that this is reported in the public service of Bosnia and Herzegovina show how far denialism has come.

While many of the survivors are still searching for the bones of their loved ones, hoping that Drina or the former neighbour will uncover the truth of what had happened to them, they have to fight yet one battle: for truth and memory. The committed crimes and their experience have been continuously denied, minimised, relativised, and belittled.

Genocide and the other crimes and their perpetrators are even celebrated and glorified and serve as an inspiration for terrorists and far-right extremists around the world.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Azeem Ibrahim, Hikmet Karčić, “The Balkan Wars Created a Generation of Christian Terrorists”, *Foreign Policy*, 24 May 2019,

All this points to the threat that Deborah Lipstadt warned us about in her book that the denial of the genocide is not an assault on the history of one particular group, but it poses a threat to all who believe that knowledge and memory are among the keystones of our civilization and to all who believe in the ultimate power of reason.<sup>20</sup>

Visegrad is “a destination where tourists will have the most diverse tourist facilities” such as sleeping in the rooms and even beds in Vilina Vlas hotel where hundreds of women, many underaged, were systematically and cruelly raped. Many were not lucky enough to survive such a horrific experience and were swallowed up by the Drina river or disappeared in flames never to be found again.

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<https://foreignpolicy.com/2019/05/24/the-balkan-wars-created-a-generation-of-christian-terrorists/?fbclid=IwAR3eWkosiyte5rACvCIGmwXgiudiG-Tgkd1KXrmNFMM3hkhEywL71-Nem9E>, accessed: 20 July 2021.

<sup>20</sup> Deborah E. Lipstadt, *Denying the Holocaust: The Growing Assault on Truth and Memory* (New York:Plume, 1994), pp. 19-20

# Srebrenica: Culmination of a Four-Year Genocide

EMIR SULJAGIĆ\*

AFTER YEARS OF SLEEPING on a mattress on the floor, I decided to have my house thoroughly renovated. A neighbor readily offered me his help as well as a place to stay for the duration of the construction. His house is in a different part of the village, on the bank of the local river. This is the part of the village that was first settled by our ancestors in the late 1880's, the result of yet another concession of the retreating Ottoman Empire. I never gave much thought to this until the war broke out. The toughest people I knew throughout what most of us imprecisely call "the war" came from that part of the village.

At one point during the siege of Srebrenica, I had an unfortunate encounter with some petty criminals in the enclave. Because of my "privileged" position as an interpreter, I could go to the semblance of authority that existed in the enclave and complain. It was

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handled, and as a result I was henceforth left alone. A few weeks later, I was visited by a group of my pre-war neighbors, all of whom were a few years older than I was. They accosted me at the town's Post Office where I worked for one of the UN agencies, and told me in no uncertain terms that they felt betrayed by the fact that I had chosen to go to outsiders for help. They told me that I was under their protection, and that if anything similar were to happen in the future I was to tell them first. I have never been so moved in my life, before or after.

As the 25th anniversary of the fall of Srebrenica and the culmination of the Bosnian genocide approaches, I think more and more about all the lives lost in the enclave before July 1995.

During the first year of the war, the siege of Srebrenica was uniquely characterized by large groups of civilians crossing the confrontation line at night, returning to their villages in search of food. The Serbs often ambushed them, killing and maiming many. No one counted the dead. Some were captured and treated barbarically. Many of my friends, neighbors, and relatives --including my father-- went on those overnight "excursions" into what had become enemy territory. I remember my father clutching a small, black hand grenade, the only weapon that he could find, which he took with him in case he was captured.

The events of July 1995 did not take place in a historical, social, political or military vacuum. To borrow a phrase from Raphael Lemkin, we were attacked on all fronts of our existence. Around a dozen elderly men and women, who were unable to leave the village on account of their advanced age, were burnt alive in a house where they stayed together, seeking

safety and comfort in numbers. Our villages were thoroughly pillaged and often razed to the ground. We were stripped of our livelihoods, our worldly possessions, and any source of stability or hope for the future. Choosing to live meant trying to survive “in the woods”. The uncertainty which characterized our daily lives was complete. People went from village to village seeking safety and shelter, only to relive the same experiences of terror, destruction and loss. Rural eastern Bosnia was raped and pillaged for three and a half years before the genocidal operation in Srebrenica was even underway.

The antiseptic nature of the judicial process which established the facts of the genocide in July 1995 belies the full extent of the carnage unleashed on the rural population of eastern Bosnia. This violence was not a function of chaos or “ancient hatreds”; it was the carefully choreographed result of a political decision made by the Bosnian Serb leadership. In May 1992, the secessionist “assembly”, which had been established the previous October by Radovan Karadzic, adopted as one of its “strategic goals” the elimination of the Drina River as a border between Bosnia and Serbia – “a border between two worlds”, as some in the Bosnian Serb leadership put it. This directive could only be implemented through the elimination of Bosniaks from that part of the country where they formed a demographic majority, whom the Bosnian Serb leadership viewed as alien and inherently hostile population. In support of this end, Serbia’s secret services and the Yugoslav National Army (JNA) continuously supplied the local Serb population with armaments and supported them in various ways throughout their attack on eastern Bosnia.

People were murdered by the hundreds on a weekly basis. Some were detained in camps that although temporary, were built for the specific purposes of torture and murder. Women were raped, often kept in private houses in deserted Bosniak or mixed villages and raped until pregnant. Others, after being terrorized and pauperized, were brutally deported. That is the context in which the genocide in Srebrenica took place. Those are the horrors which were visited upon us, and which we resisted against all odds until the moment of our execution. That is the evil which, after a grueling three-and-a-half year struggle, finally caught up with us in July 1995.

The commemoration of the 25th anniversary of the Srebrenica genocide is going to be radically different from previous years. As we organize this year's event, we are faced with a number of unprecedented challenges. These include not only the recent pandemic which has ground many of the world's ordinary operations to a halt, but also an openly hostile environment where genocide denial is pervasive. Yet our message this year is clear: we mourn the fall of Srebrenica and the lives which were tragically lost in July 1995, and recognize that Srebrenica was only the center of gravity of the Bosnian genocide. Those of us who survived this attack on our physical, cultural, and spiritual existence will not allow anyone else to define that experience for us.

As the renovation works are slowly coming to an end, I feel unusually excited about moving back in my own house. I moved out of the house that stood in its place in May 1992 and which was razed to the ground a few months later. I moved back in a year after my grandfather died in it, having returned in 2001.

It is strange that I should feel hopeful and perhaps peaceful in the place that signifies so much of my personal trauma. I believe it is because I know what was on the horizon back in the 1990's. We were meant to disappear.

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