

The Bosnian Genocide

Outline:

- (1) Ethnonationalism and Leadership (Michael Ignatieff)
- (2) War and Ethnic Cleansing (Benjamin Lieberman)
- (3) Ethnic Cleansing and Genocide (Norman Naimark)
- (4) Western Intervention
- (5) Justice
- (6) Resources and Bibliography



Exhuming the bodies of the 1995 Srebrenica massacre committed by Serbian paramilitary forces against Muslim Bosniaks in 2007. Source: Wikimedia.

(1) Ethnonationalism and Leadership (Michael Ignatieff)

(1) After Tito's death in 1980, ethnic tension mounted also as economic problems grew.

(2) Serbia found itself increasingly losing the grip on its autonomous regions (Kosovo and Vojvodina) and Yugoslavia in general. Especially, Kosovo was important as the religious heart of Serbia's medieval state and it was on Kosovo Polje that the Serbs were defeated and subjugated by the Ottoman Empire in 1381. Yet, Albanians made up 90% of Kosovo's inhabitants, and increasingly Kosovo Albanians put pressure on Serbs to leave for Serbia. An unknown Serbian bureaucrat, Slobodan Milosevic, fueled Serbian nationalism to take over the Serbian Communist Party and promote a Greater Serbia including Kosovo, Krajina, and Serb-majority parts of Bosnia.

(3) Slovenia declared its independence from Yugoslavia in 1991. Slovenian nationalism was accompanied with the promise of free elections and democratic reform similar to the peaceful revolutions in Eastern Europe. Republic elections in 1990 led to the defeat of Communists in Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia-Herzegovina and Macedonia; in Serbia, however, Milosevic's nationalists took over the Communist party and led it to an election victory. The Croatian Democratic Union under Franjo Tuđman as the democratic winner of the elections in Croatia also appealed to a staunch nationalism and ideas of a Greater Croatia, which threatened especially Bosnia-Herzegovina.



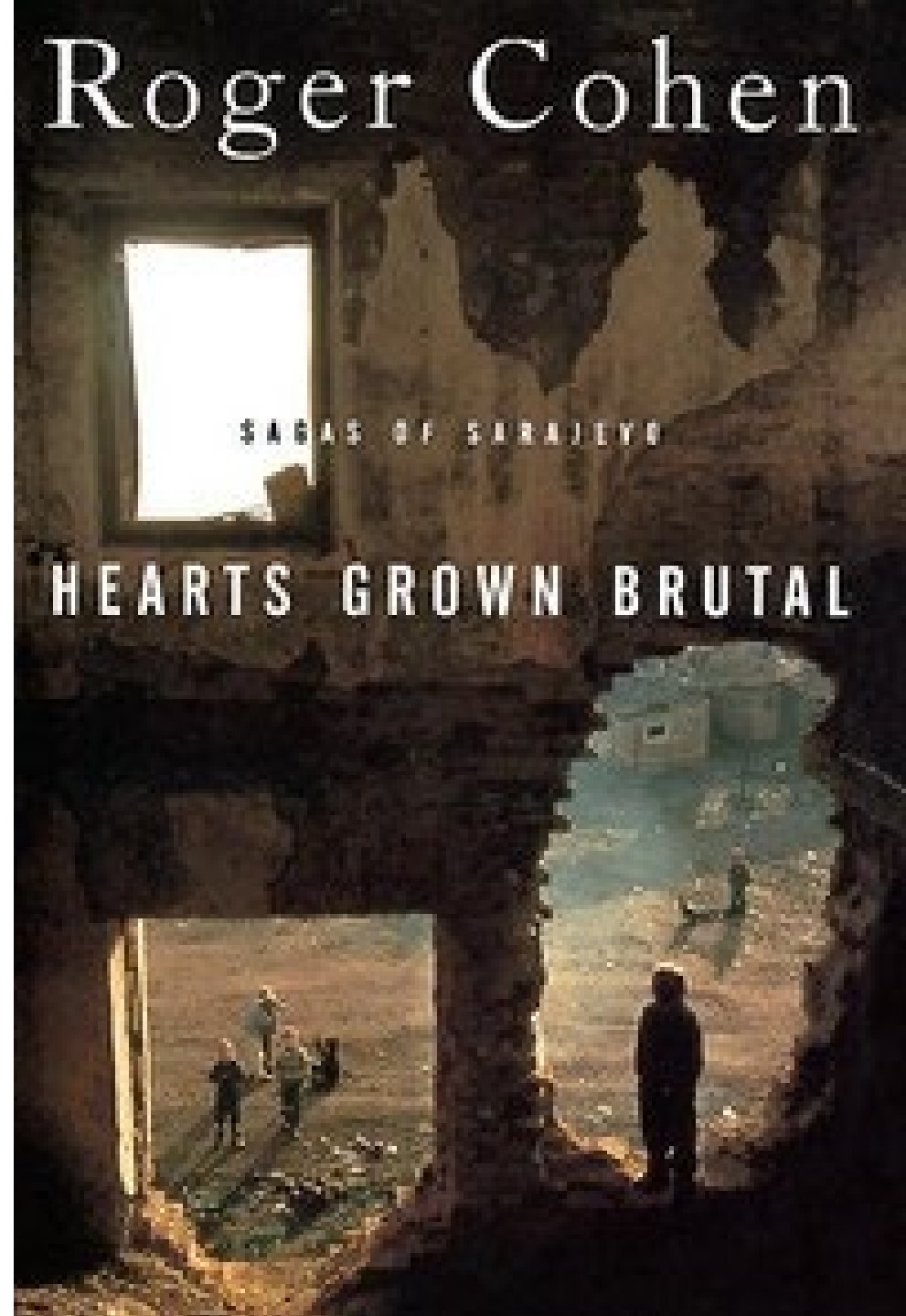
Slobodan Milošević on
Kosovo Polje in 1989.
Source: Wikimedia

“The Serb, the perennial victim, could not see himself as executioner, the Serb, as eternal liberator, could not see himself as enslaver; the Serb, as concentration camp survivor, could not see the concentration camps he built.”

Roger Cohen, *Hearts Grown Brutal. Sagas of Sarajevo* (New York: Random House 1998), p. 183.

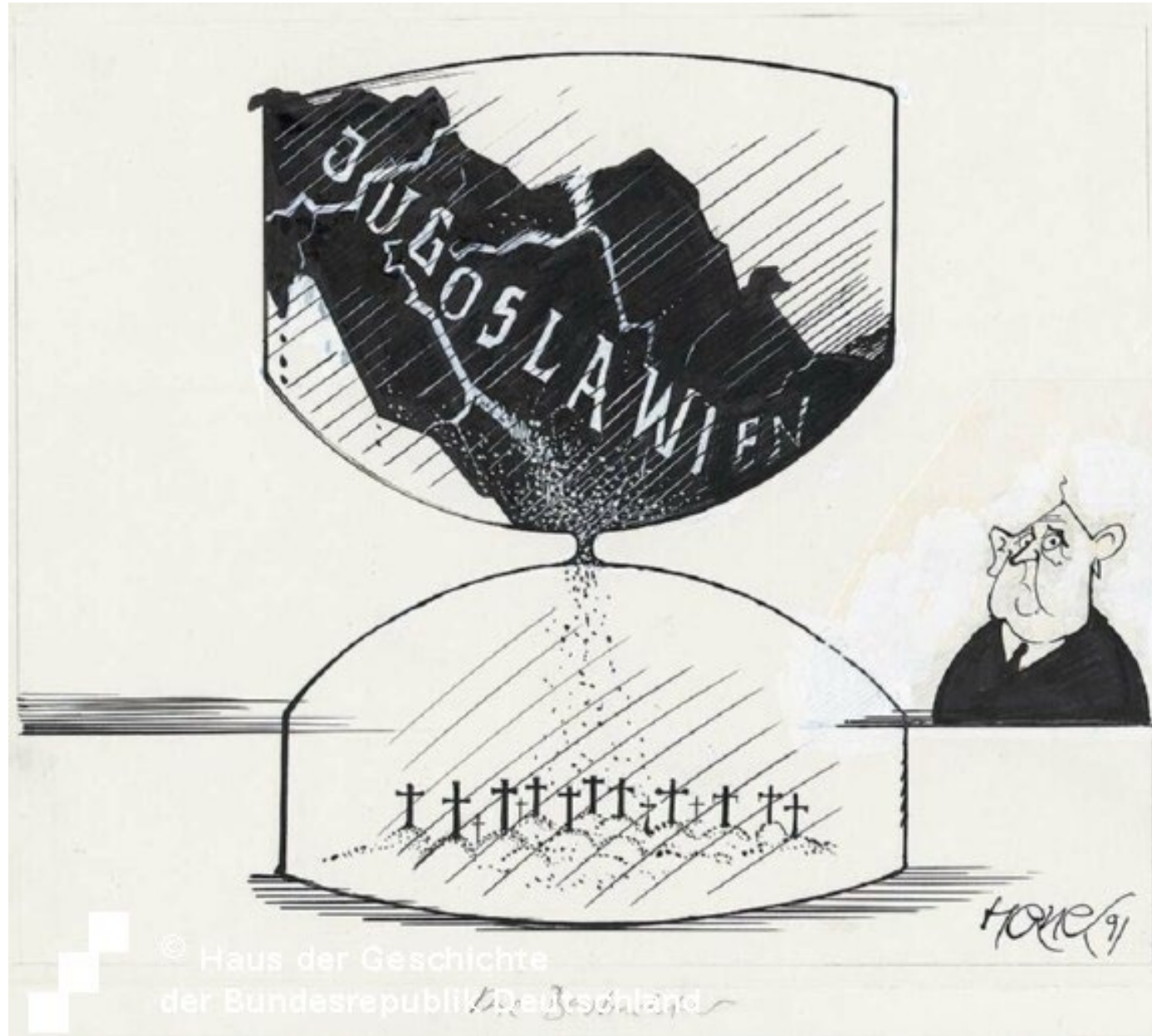
The Subaltern Genocide.

David B. MacDonald, *From Jasenovac to Srebrenica. Subaltern Genocide and the Serbs*, in: Nicholas A. Robin and Adam Jones, *Genocides by the Oppressed. Subaltern Genocide in Theory and Practice* (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press 2009).



Ethnonationalism and War

While in Slovenia the ethnic and republic boundaries coincided, Croatia and particularly Bosnia-Herzegovina had significant Serb and other minorities.



German caricature by Walter Hanel from 1991: German secretary of state Genscher can only look on. The more time passes without action, the more victims. Source: Haus der Geschichte

(2) War and Ethnic Cleansing (Benjamin Lieberman)

Slovenia's Independence

- Following Slovenian independence, war between Yugoslavia and Slovenia broke out in June 1991
- July 7, 1991: Brioni Agreement brokered by the European Community saved Slovenia from prolonged war

Croatia and Krajina

- Yugoslavia increasingly under Serbian leadership gave up Slovenia, but began attacks against Croatia that also had declared independence in 1991. The biggest problem: Serbs in Krajina.
- UN banned arms sales in Yugoslavia inadvertently favoring Serbs, as they could rely on the arsenals of the Yugoslav army (JNA)
- Ceasefire brokered by UN in November 1991 in Croatia, but Serbia had already taken about a third of Croatia's territory. Therefore, UNPROFOR on the ground did not only secure the peace, but in a way also safeguarded Serbian gains. This was only reversed in 1995 after a Croat offensive, which was not stopped by the UN.

Bosnia

- 1992, Serbia and Montenegro remained together and called themselves Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (until 2003 and 2006 respectively). With Serb gains secured in Croatia in 1991, Serb attacks now shifted to Bosnia, which declared independence in 1992 after a referendum boycotted by Serbs. Serbs then created the Republika Srpska with Radovan Karadžić as president. Driving a new offensive, Bosnian Serb leaders such as General Ratko Mladić ethnically cleansed much of Bosnia culminating in genocide in Srebrenica in 1995.

(2) War and Ethnic Cleansing (Benjamin Lieberman)

“War itself and the fear of injury and death propelled civilians to gather their belongings and leave cities, towns, and villages under attack, but ethnic cleansing was not simply an effect of war. In campaigns of ethnic cleansing, the forces that entered into mixed communities and regions made driving out unwanted populations a prime goal of violence.”

Benjamin Lieberman, *The Holocaust and Genocides in Europe* (Bloomsbury 2013), p.172f.

“Gang rape, in which men think they are proving their manhood, is part of ethnic cleansing. Unfortunately, as Amnesty International has pointed out, the juridical difficulties surrounding such crimes make prosecution of such crimes almost impossible.”

Selma Leydesdorff, *Surviving the Bosnian Genocide. The Women of Srebrenica Speak* (Indiana University Press 2015), p. 166.



The Executive Council Building in Sarajevo after being hit by artillery fire in 1992. Source: Reuters

Gravestones at the Potočari genocide memorial near Srebrenica. Source: Wikimedia



Stari Most, in Mostar, Bosnia. The bridge linking the Bosniak and Croat parts of town was destroyed in 1993 and is now reconstructed.



(3) Ethnic Cleansing and Genocide (Norman Naimark)

“Genocide is the intentional killing off of a part or all of an ethnic, religious, or national group; the murder of a people or peoples is the objective. The intention of ethnic cleansing is to remove a people and often all traces of them from a concrete territory.

(...)

At one extreme of its spectrum, ethnic cleansing is closer to forced deportation or what has been called “population transfer”, the idea is to get people to move, and the means are meant to be legal and semi-legal. At the other extreme, however, ethnic cleansing and genocide are distinguishable only by the ultimate intent.”

(...)

Forced deportation seldom takes place without violence, often murderous violence.”

Norman Naimark, *Fires of Hatred. Ethnic Cleansing in Twentieth Century Europe* (Harvard University Press 2001), p. 4f.

International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia (ICTY) tried ethnic cleansing as a war crime. In the trial against former Bosnian Serb leader Radovan Karadzic, the charge of genocide was only applied to Srebrenica.

(4) Western Intervention

According to US Ambassador Zimmerman writing in his last cable from Belgrade, it was not nationalism or ethnic and religious hatred nor the collapse of communism are the direct causes. The breakup of Yugoslavia was caused by villainous leaders (Milosevic and Tudjman), who used nationalism to promote themselves.

Timeline

- UN establishes safe havens in Bosnia in 1992, especially Srebrenica, but evacuated them after threats from Bosnian Serb forces. Especially Dutch soldiers then in charge of the UN mission were later harshly criticized for abandoning their post.
- NATO Bombing of Serbs in Bosnia, 1995
- Dayton Accords, 1995
- NATO Bombing of Serb positions in Kosovo and Serbia proper.
- The International War Crimes Tribunal 1993-today, most notably trial against Milosevic 2002-2006
- Today NATO or EU troops in peacekeeping missions in Bosnia, Kosovo, and Macedonia.



General Mladic with a Dutch commander after Srebrenica's capture. Source: Picture-Alliance

(5) Justice



Former Bosnian Serb leader Radovan Karadzic attends a hearing at the UN war crimes tribunal in The Hague. Photographer: Valerie Kuypers/Reuters. He was sentenced for committing genocide at Srebrenica.



13 INDIVIDUALS REFERRED TO COUNTRIES IN THE FORMER YUGOSLAVIA FOR TRIAL



SENTENCES ENFORCED IN 14 STATES



(Excludes accused whose sentences amounted to time spent in detention during trial, and those whose transfer is pending.)



0 FUGITIVES
as of July 2011

MORE THAN...



4,650 WITNESSES



10,800 TRIAL DAYS



2.5 MILLION PAGES OF TRANSCRIPTS

4 TYPES OF CRIMES

Genocide

Crimes against Humanity

Violations of the Laws or Customs of War

Grave Breaches of the Geneva Conventions

Infographic: ICTY Facts & Figures. Source: ICTY

(6) Resources and Bibliography

Primary Source Collections:

The USHMM also has some resources on the Bosnian Genocide. <https://www.ushmm.org/genocide-prevention/countries/bosnia-herzegovina/case-study/background/1992-1995>

On the response of the Clinton administration:

<https://clinton.presidentiallibraries.us/collections/show/37>

Survivor Testimony: <http://www.srebrenica.org.uk/>

International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia documents:

<https://www.icty.org/en/documents>

Bibliography:

Ann Petril, Hasan Hasanović, Voices from Srebrenica: Survivor Narratives of the Bosnian Genocide (New York: McFarland 2020).

Paul R. Bartrop, Bosnian Genocide: The Essential Reference Guide: The Essential Reference Guide (Santa Barbara ABC: Clio 2016).

Selma Leydesdorff, Surviving the Bosnian Genocide. The Women of Srebrenica Speak (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press 2015).

Benjamin Lieberman, The Holocaust and Genocides in Europe (London: Bloomsbury 2013).

Norman Naimark, Fires of Hatred. Ethnic Cleansing in Twentieth Century Europe (Harvard University Press 2001)

Jacqueline Ching, Genocide and the Bosnian War (New York: Rosen 2008).

David Rohde, Endgame: The Betrayal and Fall of Srebrenica, Europe's Worst Massacre Since World War (New York: Penguin 2012).

Roy Gutman, A Witness to Genocide: The 1993 Pulitzer Prize-winning Dispatches on the "ethnic cleansing" of Bosnia (New York: Macmillan 1993).

Milena Sterio, "The Karadžić Genocide Conviction: Inferences, Intent, and the Necessity to Redefine Genocide," Emory International Law Review 31 (2017): 271-298.

Richard Holbrooke, To End a War (New York: The Modern Library 1999)