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RESISTANCE TO TRANSITIONAL JUSTICE IN BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA: GENOCIDE DENIAL AND TRIUMPHALISM

[Sead Turčalo, Hikmet Karčić (Eds.), *Bosnian Genocide Denial and Triumphalism: Origins, Impact and Prevention*, Faculty of Political Science University of Sarajevo, Srebrenica Memorial Center, and Institute for Islamic Tradition of Bosniaks, Sarajevo, 2021]

For almost thirty years survivors of the war of extinction in Bosnia and Herzegovina struggle to understand, accept and live with human losses, violence, and destruction under policy umbrella of transitional justice¹. Their memories, trauma, experiences, identities, and faith have been continuously challenged by socially engineered post-Dayton democratic predicaments. Namely, managed by its governments for more than twenty years, this fragile democracy has necessitated a firm international supervision and control, thus dislocating emancipatory powers of Bosniaks' civic rights to the margins of transitional justice activism and affirmative actions. This publication therefore is a testament to transitional justice's inability to deliver justice and peace promised by its proponents to all victims of nationalist and violent Yugoslav disintegration. As is it evident from presented contributions, transitional justice process in Bosnia and Herzegovina produces resistance in the form of historical revisionism, genocide denial and triumphalism.

¹ For transitional justice definition see official web site of the UNDP Global Rule of Law and Human Rights Global Programme: https://2020rolhr.undp.org/focus/transitional-justice/?utm_source=EN&utm_medium=GSR&utm_content=US_UNDP_PaidSearch_Brand_English&utm_campaign=CENTRAL&c_src=CENTRAL&c_src2=GSR&gclid=Cj0KCQiA3rKQBhCNARIsACUEW_aoZR1R3iRnyWj7g6x6sEsb9ox46WafvJhi359_nJ4S-4FV_zyOvXwaAsFAEALw_wcB.

Editors, Sead Turčalo and Hikmet Karčić in their preface to the collection of selected contributions presented at interdisciplinary conference *Denial and Triumphalism: Origins, Impact and Prevention* in Sarajevo on July 10, 2020, therefore open space for discussion about the nature of persuasive genocide denial and resistance to confront it not only domestically, but internationally as well. Editors emphasize how Srebrenica genocide, demands accountability of those who are incapable of self-reflexivity, introspection, and comprehension since their actions nowadays enable reappropriation of false representations of unparalleled post-modern barbarism perpetuated against Bosnian citizens at the end of the 21st Century. Under the title *Bosnian Genocide Denial and Triumphalism: Origins, Impact and Prevention*, this publication on 191 pages provides insight into complex issues related to the contemporary Srebrenica genocide denial and growing pathological triumphalism related to it. Nineteen contributions, based on authors' professional affiliations and capacities, fall under four different types of approaches to the subject of genocide denial and triumphalism.

Three contributions fall under the category of personal accounts/retrospectives that recollect experiences and subsequent activism in raising public awareness about Srebrenica genocide and consequences of Yugoslav wars of disintegration. Samantha Power, Peter Maass, and Emir Suljagić provide readers with a compelling insight into international power politics and domestic warfare and violence in times of turbulent state disintegration. While from a different vantage point, those authors nonetheless make a compelling case against contemporary denial and triumphalism related to Srebrenica genocide. Namely, Samantha Power's recollections of the past and present genocide denials are however overshadowed by her policy deliberations about Russia's "zero-sum mindset" that feeds, she claims, contemporary Serbian foreign politics and attitudes towards war atrocities committed in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Srebrenica. Highly essentialized and emotionalized activism of Power's contribution thus represents a collage of journalist recollections, real politik (international relations) reasoning, scholarly fractography and personal attitudes. As such, it provides nonetheless a valuable source of information to scholars who are interested to investigate post-modernist discourse on contemporary transitional justice politics and policies implemented during and after violent armed conflict by international professionals and government officials. Peter Maass, on the other hand, as experienced journalist, has provided a compelling case about painstaking struggles of small nations to wage imposed wars that are first fought with guns, and afterwards with memory. His honest and insightful recollections under the constant scrutiny of self-reflection

(not only about war events, but as well, about his own journalist profession) provide starting point to question why certain truths and sources of information about Yugoslav war crimes and Srebrenica genocide are intentionally hidden and unavailable to the publics. Therefore, he warns that hidden power relations and produced knowledge should alarm not only journalists but the publics in general. Same line of thought is also followed by powerful eyewitness account of Emir Suljagić. In his contribution, next to war recollections, Suljagić testifies to a resilient capacity of Srebrenica survivors who are persistent in their efforts to preserve sites of memory and respect for brutally killed fellow citizens and family members, despite and against domestic and international genocide denial and triumphalism.

Ten contributions by scholars² from various academic backgrounds further on fall under the category of academic/intellectual activism, representing each in its own way, firm belief, and dedication to the memory of Srebrenica genocide. The underline thread of intellectual moral and ethical responsibility to preserve memory and respect for the victims of mass atrocities committed in Srebrenica, which is common to all those contributions, provides nonetheless a versatile starting point in the investigation of contemporary genocide denial and pathological triumphalism, both, domestically and internationally. Marko A. Hoare's critical account of the radical (liberal) left in the Western polity and academy is thus, along-awaited subaltern view of the Yugoslav wars of disintegration, Serbian aggression, committed war crimes and Srebrenica genocide. Samuel Totten's compelling rationale for pro-active approach in combat against genocide denial and triumphalism through comprehensive recommendations he proposes, represents morally justified call to combat "deniers of genocide" using scientific research, education, lobbying and military technology. Even though Totten's recommendations are premised on good intentions, it is however questionable whether they can take over and control resistance to transitional justice process in Bosnia and Herzegovina, enhancing deniers' capacity for self-reflection, recognition, and accountability. Nenad Dimitrijević's self-reflexive account of war crimes and atrocities committed on his behalf by members of Serbian nation, however, shows how on subjective level moral responsibility, memory and acknowledgment of truth predominantly stays in the realm of individual as the only way to escape the collective – collectivity of Serbian nationals that are incapable to revoke genuine feelings of regret and sorrow for their fellow human beings – Srebrenica Bosniaks. Contributions of Edina Bećirević, Hamza Karčić, Hikmet Karčić, Mehnaz M. Afridi, Gabriela Gh-

² Marko Attila Hoare, Samuel Totten, Nenad Dimitrijević, Edina Bećirević, Hamza Karčić, Hikmet Karčić, Mehnaz M. Afridi, Gabriela Ghindea, Jasmin Mujanović, and Adnan Delalić.

inea, Jasmin Mujanović, and Adnan Delalić further on emphasize to various degrees deeply rooted divisions, contradictions and divergent notions of truth, memory, justice, and rights among constitutive peoples of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Resistance on part of the Serbian nation (in Republika Srpska and in the Republic of Serbia) not only in the form of nationalism and violence, but more importantly, in the form of genocide denial and triumphalism, according to those authors, is re-framed to serve post-modernist banalization of evil (as indicated by Stjepan Meštrović and Thomas Cushman), whether politically or academically.

This banality of evil is further on discussed in three contributions which fall under critical scholarship category where David J. Simon, Hariz Halilovich and Ehlimana Memišević argue, that genocide denial and triumphalism has to do with contemporary understanding and application of humanitarian law, human rights and justice, thus mitigated and managed by international organizations and power politics; while on the other hand contemporary neoliberal commercialization of history and culture contains an empowering potential to legitimize erasure and memory denial in sites of memory where Serbs have committed war crimes (sexual abuse) such as Višegrad. Finally, beside those critical scholarly efforts that tackle issues of genocide denial and triumphalism in and out of Bosnia and Herzegovina, there are two contributions that fall under the fourth category of mainstream transitional justice scholarship. Namely, Andras Redmayer documents and recounts devastating effects of warfare in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and he explains how intentional destruction of cultural and religious heritage and symbols of Bosniaks is “physical and biological destruction” recognized by the ICTY³ judgements. Jennifer Trahan thus provides an overview of ICTY’s legacy and its reasoned justifications for the future practice in persecution of war crimes and crimes against humanity. Her contribution is of great value to critical transitional justice scholarship because it represents a template-based example of legal and policy research that does not provide evidence as to why invested efforts into retributive mechanisms of transitional justice have produced deviant social responses in form of genocide denial and triumphalism, despite ICTY’s adherence to conventional wisdom it deems it has created. Detected negative effects of retributive transitional justice in Bosnia and Herzegovina, according to Trahan, are put in causal relationship to court’s trials and sentences that tried to establish factual truths and deliver justice, but without taking responsibility for the subsequent impact ICTY’s rulings will have on everyday life of Bosniak survivors.

³ The International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia.

This publication is, therefore, a valuable resource of knowledge and information, which stands out precisely because it has great potential to, on one hand, enable sub-altern scholarship of indigenous Bosniak scholars, and on the other hand, to counter-act already established scientifically based injustices produced by the traditional transitional justice scholarship.

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