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GENOCIDE AGAINST BOSNIAKS IN SREBRENICA: THE IDEOLOGY OF DENIALISM

[*Genocid nad Bošnjacima, Srebrenica 1995–2020: Uzroci, razmjere i posljedice*, Muamer Džananović, Zilha Mastalić-Košuta and Merisa Karović-Babić (Eds.), Institut za istraživanje zločina protiv čovječnosti i međunarodnog prava Univerziteta u Sarajevu - Univerzitet u Sarajevu - Univerzitet u Tuzli - Institut za historiju Univerziteta u Sarajevu, Sarajevo – Tuzla, 2021]

Edited Volume entitled *Genocide against Bosniaks, Srebrenica 1995–2020: Causes, Scale and Consequences* (*Genocid nad Bošnjacima, Srebrenica 1995–2020: Uzroci, razmjere i posljedice*), which was prepared as a result of an international conference in Sarajevo between 19 and 20 October 2020, offers – in an interdisciplinary way – an important insight into the social, political, legal and cultural determinants of genocide against Bosniaks in Srebrenica. The publishing of this Edited Volume comes very timely, as the contemporary trajectories show how important it is not only to re-reflect the key postulates that culminated into the first genocide on the European soil after the Second World War, but also to understand broader context, in which the denial of the genocide against Bosniaks in Srebrenica becomes the final stage of genocide *per se*.¹

As written by Vidal-Naquet in his classic *Assassins of Memory: Essays on the Denial of the Holocaust*, the truth, which seems to be "indestructible", is what the deniers tend to relativize by projecting the misapprehensions in order to destroy a "general

¹ Cox, John, Amal Khoury, and Sarah Minslow (2022), *Denial: The Final Stage of Genocide*, Routledge, London and New York

awareness of the truth”.² This Edited Volume contributes to the existing scholarly debate(s) not only via the solidification of the ”indestructible truth” through the historical analysis (pp. 333–501) and the analysis of key legal postulates that entrenches the international community (pp. 161–313), but also by apprehending the socio-political consequences of the genocide in Srebrenica (pp. 785–921) via the reflection on the genesis of the ideology that underpins such denial (pp. 527–677). By doing this, the authors of the Edited Volume offered at least three-layered discussion of the complex interplay of the past, present and the future; not only that the authors offered an understanding on how the alleged antagonisms between different ethnic groups in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) tended to be instrumentalized for achieving particular political goals amidst the repeated thesis of the BiH’s spirit of neighborliness (*komšilik*) (pp. 103–127), but also how and why such antagonisms between ethnic groups are upkept in the contemporary socio-political environment of BiH by the ethnopolitical elite in Republika Srpska (RS) in order maintain its political position in this subnational entity (pp. 785–833).

Deriving from this – and based on the contemporary socio-political trajectories that exist in RS – one of the most important aspects of this Edited Volume comes in what Karčić understands as a ”triumphalism”, which goes beyond mere denial.³ The idea of denialism and revisionism, which is at the forefront of the chapter four of the Edited Volume (pp. 527–551; pp. 551–605), illuminates another important aspect of the contemporary socio-political environment of RS; something that Karčić (2022, p. 101) frames as “becoming a core civic and political value“. By this, Karčić (ibid.) refers to the idea that the RS was established on the basis of broader ethnic cleansing that occurred during the Bosnian war. At the forefront of the process of crafting the above-mentioned values, is what Džananović (2021, pp. 653–677) calls the ”forgetting of the (d)evil” (*zaboraviti zlo*).⁴ Such process can be – as Tromp lucidly argues – understood via the narratives and the discourse that underpin the whole process of denial, which should be understood as a ‘continuum’.⁵ The latter has, according to

² Vidal-Naquet, Pierre (1993), *Assassins of Memory: Essays on the Denial of the Holocaust*, Columbia University Press, New York

³ Karčić, Hikmet (2022), ”Triumphalism: The Final stage of the Bosnian genocide”, In: John Cox, Amal Khoury and Sarah Minslow (Eds.), *Denial: The Final Stage of Genocide*, London - New York, 99–113.

⁴ Džananović, Muamer (2020), ”Zaboraviti zlo – put ka pomirenju ili jedan od specifičnih načina negiranja genocida nad Bošnjacima”. In: Muamer Džananović, Zilha Mastalić-Košuta and Merisa Karović-Babić (Eds.), *Genocid nad Bošnjacima, Srebrenica 1995–2020: Uzroci, razmjere i posljedice*, Sarajevo - Tuzla, 653–677.

⁵ Tromp, Nevenka (2020), ”Tranzicijski, posttranzicijski i strateški narativi o genocidu u Bosni i Hercegovini”, In: Muamer Džananović, Zilha Mastalić-Košuta and Merisa Karović-Babić (Eds.), *Genocid nad Bošnjacima, Srebrenica 1995–2020: Uzroci, razmjere i posljedice*, Sarajevo - Tuzla, 551–605.

Massey, six phases, namely: i) dehumanization as denial; ii) emergent denial; iii) bounded denial; iv) interpretive denial; v) embedded denial; vi) forgetting as denial. Particularly the last two phases are important for this Edited Volume, as the authors showed how glorification, de-memorialization, institutionalized denial and developed strategies to erase the memory of genocide are becoming a part and parcel of the contemporary socio-political dynamics in BiH.⁶

Apart from this, the Edited Volume's reflection on a plethora of meta-theoretical approaches, which is done via the intersectionality of the genocide in Srebrenica, i.e., micro-, mezzo-, macro-level; political, legal, ethnic and cultural dimension; (supra)national, regional and local contextualization. In this way, this work can (and should) become a cornerstone or rounded signpost for students of various disciplines (e.g., sociology, political sciences, history, etc.) on how the manifestation of instability (in this case through the contemporary trajectories of the process of de-memorialization of the genocide in Srebrenica) affects the lack of identity security of individuals and groups. The question of the identity security leads me to become one of those researchers who find a weak point in the fact that something is not in the Edited Volume, instead of taking some other Edited Volume that takes into the account such theoretical-conceptual lens. Given that all the authors reflect on the national(istic) and monoethnic views on the contemporaneity of memorializing the genocide in Srebrenica amidst the absence of stable process of remembering, I am reverting to the present monograph, while actually looking at the (possibly) next one. In doing so, I am looking at one theoretical approach that could be used in the Edited Volume to address the issues of narratives at the crossroads of crises (numerous political crises in BiH), which would give both the authors and the readers additional insights into the instability of identity narratives. The first approach could be ontological security, which, unlike securitization (as one of the (un)consciously central concepts of the Edited Volume) understands security as positive, or even desirable. Moreover, with the conceptual framework of ontological security, which Laing (1960)⁷ and Giddens (1991)⁸ define as "confidence in preserving of one's Self" and "having, at the level of the unconscious and practically conscious, answers to fundamental existential questions", the present Edited Volume could analyze – through the contextualization of the contemporary socio-political environment of RS – the meaning of Srebrenica as an "ontic

⁶ Massey, Simon (2022), "The Bosnian genocide and the "Continuum of Denial"". In: John Cox, Amal Khoury and Sarah Minslow (Eds.), *Denial: The Final Stage of Genocide*, London - New York, 113–131.

⁷ Laing, Robert D. (1960), *The Divided Self: An Existential Study in Sanity and Madness*, Penguin Books, London

⁸ Giddens, Anthony (1991), *Modernity and Self-Identity*, Polity, Cambridge

space” for the ‘ethnic Self’ of both the Bosniaks and Bosnian Serbs. The latter, defined by Mitzen⁹, Browning and Joenniemi¹⁰ and Björkdahl¹¹ as a material space that both through projection and introjection of the (strategic) narratives becomes a material object that maintains the security of one’s own Self, does not remain immune to potential anxiety (of the Bosniaks in this case) during the process of de-memorialization of the genocide. This in turn is becoming a stable ‘*lieu de mémoire*’ for maintaining the political Self of the RS by managing the potential anxieties in this entity amidst the process of memorialization of the genocide in Srebrenica.

This also results in (own) critical footnote. In the future, our conceptual tools will have to revert to our own academic field(s), as we – also reflected in the final part of the Edited Volume (i.e., methodological discussion) – are (also) the ones who generate discourses and development trends via our research interest. In this respect, the formation of the identity categories does not remain on paper, but passes through the practicum and curricula into the field of socialization. Since such discussions must not remain at the level of departments and chairs, it is necessary to educate future generations, who will have to (re)think identities in the post-materialist (ontic) space beyond intro-subjective understanding of the structural factors. The latter not only enable but also upkeep the strategies of denial, which go beyond mere revisionism by projecting the misapprehensions to destroy a ”general awareness of the truth” surrounding the genocide in Srebrenica.

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⁹ Mitzen, Jennifer (2006), “Ontological Security in World Politics: State Identity and the Security Dilemma”, *European Journal of International Relations*, 12(3), 341–370.

¹⁰ Browning, Christopher, Perti Joenniemi (2016), “Ontological Security, self-articulation and the securitization of identity”, *Cooperation and Conflict*, 52(1), 31–47.

¹¹ Björkdahl, Annika (2018), *Republika Srpska: Imaginary, performance and spatialization*, *Political Geography*, 66, 34–43.