

**“Dying Twice in a Bosnian Town”: Prijedor in the Second World War
and in the Bosnian War**

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Abstract

While the break-up of Yugoslavia received considerable attention from scholars, the possible effects of the Second World War on the violent nature of the Yugoslav Wars received limited consideration. In this thesis I study the effects of the mass killings of the Bosnian Serbs in Prijedor by the Croatian Ustasha regime on the crimes committed by the Bosnian Serbs in the Bosnian War. My study relies on the original sources published by the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia. I also critically evaluate the existing academic literature on ethnic conflict in general and the Bosnian War in particular.

The key finding of my thesis is that the atrocities of the Ustasha regime on the Prijedor Serbs boosted the Prijedor Serbs' sense that Prijedor is "Serbian". The Prijedor Serbs greeted with rage the Bosniaks and Croat attempt to "dispossess" them by majority voting in 1992. Thus, neither fear of a new Ustasha regime nor the purported desire of the Bosnian Serbs to "avenge themselves" explain the crimes committed by the Prijedor Serb armed forces in 1992.

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Introduction

Background and Thesis

When Yugoslavia collapsed in the last decade of the twentieth century, everyone was quick to point out the role of often troublesome history in the break-up. At the same time, scholars were at pains to locate properly the exact role history or historical memory played in the process.

Initially, some scholars identified the violence with the supposed “ancient hatreds”. Since the main culprits invoked ethnic grievances stemming from the past, the academic consensus, however, quickly stamped out the past as a cause or a background to violence so as not to “whitewash” or even facilitate human rights violations. But while I share the concerns of the academic community, the abuse of history does not *eo ipso* speak for its irrelevance.

The paper will focus on violence in Prijedor, a county in Bosnia and Hercegovina¹, during the Second World War and during the War in Bosnia. When the Second World War engulfed Yugoslavia in April 1941, the municipality of Prijedor had roughly 55 000 inhabitants, of which roughly 33 000 were Serbs, 16 000 were Bosniaks, and 6 000 were Croats. By the end of the war in 1945, about 4 600 civilians were killed, of which Serbs comprised 4 400.² When the Bosnian War erupted in April 1992, the municipality of Prijedor had about 112 000 inhabitants,

¹ For reasons of brevity, I use “Bosnia” in the rest of the thesis.

² Marina Ljubičić. “Страдање цивилног становništva општине Приједор у периоду од 1941-1942. године.” [The suffering of the civilian population of the municipality of Prijedor in the period from 1941-1942. years.] *Годишњак Музеја Жртва геноцида* 6 (2014): 21-32.

of which 49 000 were Bosniaks, 47 500 were Serbs, and 7 500 Croats. By the end of the war in 1995, 4 400 civilians were killed, of which Bosniaks comprised almost 4 000.³

What is the connection between the two episodes of mass communal violence? While morally dubious, it would be tempting to claim that the crimes the Serbs committed in the nineties were a “revenge” for the crimes that were committed against them in the Second World War. Alternatively, one might want to claim that the mass killings in the Second World War made the Serbs paranoid and thus an easy prey for nationalist elites in the eighties and nineties. I reject both explanations. The results of my thesis are twofold. First, I argue that the example of Prijedor Serbs in the nineties shows that it was not fear of a possible repetition of violence that made the Bosnian Serbs contest Bosnia’s sovereignty and later on commit war crimes, but rather anger. More to the point, the Prijedor Serbs felt that the mass violence they experienced in the Second World War at the hands of the Croats and Bosniaks, obviated any legitimate claim the Croats and Bosniaks might have over Prijedor. Moreover, I argue that that sense of moral outrage was not conjured up by the Serbian political and intellectual elites, and was at most suppressed during the Communist rule. Second, I use a counterfactual to argue that even without the massacres of the Second World War, the Prijedor Serbs would have contested Bosnia’s sovereignty, the contestation of which would have led them to commit war crimes against the Croats and Bosniaks, albeit, possibly, on a smaller scale.

Moreover, an incidental result of the research will be to show that the prevalent conceptualization of historical memory – as being either misused by national elites for

³ Mirsad Tokača, *Bosanska knjiga mrtvih, Tom I* [Bosnian book of the Dead] (Sarajevo: Istaživačko-dokumentacioni centar, 2012), 175-179.

warmongering reasons or intentionally repressed by the same elites for ulterior political goals – assigns a plasticity of sorts to historical memory that is not born out by evidence.

Methodology

Noah Smith, an American economist and former assistant professor of finance at Stony Brook University in New York, recently wrote a piece challenging the purported tendency in historiography to generalize from isolated historical episodes, i.e., from skewed or small samples, when trying to explain either the past or the present.⁴ The key engine with which, according to Smith, historians theorize are analogies. But analogies too often serve as a cover for supposedly sloppy, empirically untested reasoning, that dresses up correlations as causations. And while historians often profess their work is primarily “idiographic”, Noah asserts it is a common pitfall in historical sciences to smuggle in theoretical explanations for events rather than just providing detailed descriptions.

Smith’s critique of historical science was answered by Bret Devereaux, a historian specializing in ancient history, particularly the history of Rome and the classical world.⁵ The crux of Devereaux’s rejoinder is that while historians do occasionally use statistical or more rigorous

⁴ Noah Smith. "On the Wisdom of the Historians." Noahpinion. Accessed April 22, 2023. https://noahpinion.substack.com/p/on-the-wisdom-of-the-historians?utm_medium=email&fbclid=IwAR1-RgAyUcyiJW6uXYzheVi62ce6ADGu8MApivZ-mU8AFAY36JXUVdruaM. Before joining Stony Brook, Smith worked as an assistant professor of economics at the University of Michigan. In addition to his academic work, Noah Smith is known for his contributions as a writer and blogger.

⁵ Bret Devereaux. "New Acquisitions: On the Wisdom of Noah Smith." A Collection of Unmitigated Pedantry (blog). August 29, 2022. Accessed April 22, 2023. https://acoup.blog/2022/08/29/new-acquisitions-on-the-wisdom-of-noah-smith/?fbclid=IwAR2vDynZTFrtIvMm7W-y33LqswCalGXLH7PJ_KBhMpCbZFrjB8yrqnC3QBk. He holds a PhD in ancient history and has taught at various institutions. Devereaux is known for his blog, "A Collection of Unmitigated Pedantry" (ACOU), where he writes about history, historiography, and historical methodology, often in the context of analyzing popular culture and media, such as movies, TV shows, and video games.

empirical methods to test their theories, historical studies by their nature most of the time do not contain the data amenable to statistical testing. In Devereaux's own words: "The actual complexity has to be flattened out to produce data; this isn't a critique of the theory [democratic peace theory] – the flattening was unavoidable. Some more recent efforts at the problem have tried assigning democracy or liberalism 'scores' to countries but of course that itself introduces all sorts of complications. The conversion or compression of fuzzy, non-numerical evidence to data is thus not free, it is a 'lossy' process." In other words, historians often study phenomena with a sample size of one, and so importing techniques from social sciences would as much "flatten" the studied events as would contribute to their more rigorous understanding. Devereaux continues: "The present-tense implications of historical research generally come in two kinds: either the history of a thing (usually an institution) that still exists is used to explain how that thing came to exist as it does or the history of something in the past is presented as analogous to something similar in the present, such that the former is a useful tool when thinking about the latter." The first kind of historical studies are most of all concerned with investigating original historical records, a study of which naturally takes up most of historians' time. Devereaux concludes that the key added-value provided by historians consist in extracting the appropriate context for both the current and the past events.

I find Devereaux's rejoinder convincing, and as I will further elaborate in the conclusion, my thesis is partly inspired by the present-day need to come to terms with a still existing "institution" of the memories of the atrocities visited by the Serbs, Croats and Bosniaks upon each other in the twentieth century.

Why exactly Prijedor? The wealth of preserved evidence on violence in Prijedor in both wars is extraordinary, as in both cases the perpetrators were prosecuted, and violent episodes carefully studied for juridical reasons.

Sources

The backbone of the study will be represented by the original sources published by the The International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY). The ICTY was a body of the United Nations that was established to prosecute the war crimes that had been committed during the Yugoslav Wars and to try their perpetrators. For the Second World War, I will rely on the secondary literature.

A note on the ICTY sources. The published sources exactly reflect the legal interests that have guided the court in its trials. Therefore, there is not a single military unit, military institution or military operation whose documentary legacy has been admitted into evidence in full. Even more significantly, whereas for the Croat and Serb troops enough documents have been published to roughly reconstruct their doings, for the workings of the Bosniak troops I had to rely entirely on the secondary literature. In the case of Prijedor, however, numerous ICTY trials against the perpetrators left a rich and reasonably complete documentary legacy of the workings and thinking of the Prijedor Serb political and military leadership, as well as a host of documents on the individual perpetrators such as detention camps guards and local policemen.

All ICTY documents were translated in English by the ICTY translators. All other translations in English are my own.⁶

Literature Review

Literature on Ethnic Violence and Nationalism

Nebojša Vladislavljević suggests that the academic literature about the breakup of Yugoslavia suffers from excessive attention to empirical detail, and a paucity of both theoretical ambitions and theoretical underpinnings.⁷ As a palliative he recommends perusing the theoretical works in comparative politics on ethnic conflict and studying the breakup in a historically comparative perspective (above all vis-à-vis the dissolution of the Soviet Union). In the following, I analyze the representative works on ethnic violence and nationalism from sociology, political science, and international relations.

The literature on ethnic violence, ethnic civil wars, nationalism, and related phenomena is vast. Needless to say, I do not offer a comprehensive review of the literature in the present chapter. Rather, I will lay out some of the most prominent theoretical and empirical works that will serve as both a theoretical lynchpin and the proverbial punchbag for the study of violence in Prijedor. Moreover, my goal is to evaluate how well the standard theoretical works on ethnic

⁶ A detailed user guide on how to use the ICTY database can be found at “ICTY Court Records Database. User Guide.R01” UN IRMCT, November 2018. https://www.irmct.org/sites/default/files/documents/2018-12_ICTY_Court_Records_Database_User_Guide_R01_ENG.pdf

⁷ Nebojša Vladislavljević, "Does Scholarly Literature on the Breakup of Yugoslavia Travel Well?" In *Debating the End of Yugoslavia*, eds Florian Bieber and Armina Galijaš (London: Routledge, 2014), 1–21.

conflict and the Yugoslav wars explain the role of the Second World War mass killings on the mass killings in the nineties.

The foundational works on nationalism center the importance of territory for nationalist identity and emphasize how much of the toxicity of nationalism emerges from the feeling of anger if those territorial claims are thwarted. Thus, Ernest Gellner, in his seminal work, "Nations and Nationalism" (1983), posits at the very beginning that "Nationalism is primarily a political principle, which holds that the political and the national unit should be congruent."⁸ But nowhere in the rest of the book does Gellner explore the mechanisms by which nations come to see some land as "rightfully" their own, and what role real historical events might have played in grounding such "rights".⁹ Anthony Smith in "The Ethnic Origins of Nations" provides a more nuanced account of the nature of nationalism, and the many ways nations' territorial claims are mediated by historically constructed "ownership rights". In documenting this process, Smith notes that "Hence, it is not only necessary to become conversant with the histories of particular *ethnie* if we wish to gauge their range of map-making and moralities in our era; we need also to grasp the histories of their successive rediscoveries..."¹⁰. Smith, however, does not discuss in his book instances of communal violence that nations translate into "ownership rights".

⁸ Ernest Gellner, *Nations and nationalism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2008), 1.

⁹ Gellner further explores the concept of ethnic identity in "Encounters with Nationalism" (1994), but, again, does not discuss the bearing of history on nations' territorial claims. Ernest Gellner, *Encounters with Nationalism* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1994). Similar omission is present in Anderson Benedict, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 2016). For a recent account of nationalism in the Balkans along the same modernist theories of nationalism, see Siniša Malešević, *Grounded Nationalism. A Sociological Analysis* (Cambridge University Press, 2019), 160-188.

¹⁰ Anthony Smith, *The Ethnic Origins of Nations*, (London: Blackwell Publishing, 1986), 207.

Donald L. Horowitz, in his seminal work “Ethnic Groups in Conflict”¹¹, proposes a group psychological theory for ethnic conflict, suggesting that a significant portion of the discord between different ethnic communities arises from comparative group dynamics. Individuals assess their value in comparison to others, and given that a person's identity is frequently intertwined with their group identity, their self-esteem is affected by how their group measures up against others. This description of ethnic conflict does not capture well the dynamics of the conflict in Prijedor in the nineties, as that conflict was driven by conflicting territorial claims rather than by the questions of status. Horowitz, moreover, underemphasizes the role of history, in particular the role of historical grievances, as his theoretical enterprise is focused more on the ethnic conflicts that emerged in the wake of post-colonial struggles.¹² His account does, however, underline the importance of territory for ethnic conflict. He writes that:

Ethnic claims to priority or exclusion are supported by appeals to moral principles...the moral basis of ethnic claims lies in group legitimacy within a territory...to understand the concept of group legitimacy, it is necessary to link it to ownership ... to be legitimate is to be identified with the territory...as patrimony confronts equality, group legitimacy provides a foundation for the recurrent psychological denial that another group owns an equal share in the land.¹³

The events and the crimes in Prijedor in the nineties, I will argue, are best understood as just such “claims to priority or exclusion”, where “group legitimacy within a territory” is partly grounded in the memories of past atrocities. Unfortunately, in his discussion of the common basis of territorial claims made by ethnic groups in conflict, Horowitz leaves out episodes of past ethnic violence.¹⁴

¹¹ Donald L Horowitz, *Ethnic Groups in Conflict* (University of California Press, 1985).

¹² Horowitz, *Ethnic Groups in Conflict*, 95. “But most ethnic groups are new. History can be a weapon, and tradition can fuel ethnic conflict, but a current conflict cannot generally be explained by simply calling it a revived form of an earlier conflict”.

¹³ Ibid, 201-202.

¹⁴ Ibid, 202-209. He lists four common principles: indigenesness, special mission, traditional rule, and the right to succeed the colonial power.

Literature on Violence in Yugoslavia and Bosnia

Let us look at some of the representative works on ethnic conflict from the field of the International Relations. Barry R. Posen in “The security dilemma and ethnic conflict”¹⁵ argues that the ethnic conflict that fueled the wars in Bosnia and Croatia can best be seen as an instance of violence induced by security dilemma. After the collapse of the authority of the federal powers in the eighties, the Serbs and Croats came to mistrust each other. The mistrust was fueled by the atrocities committed by both sides in the Second World War.¹⁶ Essentially the same point is made by Stuart Kaufman in “An ‘international’ theory of inter-ethnic war”, albeit with further distinctions between the Bosniaks on the one hand, and the Serbs and the Croats on the other hand.¹⁷ We can, therefore say, that Posen and Kaufman argue, among other things, that the mass killings in the Second World War induced fear in the Serbs and others in Bosnia in nineties that pushed them toward violent means. Kaufman developed his theory undergirding his account of ethnic conflict further in “Nationalist Passions”¹⁸. At the core of his account is his theory of symbolic politics where the ingroup-outgroup dynamic is exacerbated by prejudices and abused by aggressive “framing” utilized by enterprising leaders:

This account of ethnic politics starts with the group narratives that define the group and also characterize neighboring groups. The more these narratives are repeated over years and decades, the more strongly they convey stereotypes of the other groups that can harden into prejudice... In the second step, the stronger the prejudice is at any given time, the greater the likelihood that the disliked group’s behavior will be perceived as threatening. Greater threat perceptions and stronger prejudices encourage leaders to frame issues in terms of threat, resulting in the third step, public support for aggressive action against the perceived threat. Finally, if they have the support of public opinion and effective organizations, these aggressive leaders can take the fourth step, mobilizing their groups either for peaceful contention or for war.¹⁹

¹⁵ Barry R Posen, "The security dilemma and ethnic conflict." *Survival* 35, no. 1 (1993): 27-47.

¹⁶ Posen, "The security dilemma and ethnic conflict.", 36.

¹⁷ Stuart J Kaufman, "An ‘international’ theory of inter-ethnic war." *Review of International Studies* 22, no. 2 (1996): 149-171.

¹⁸ Stuart J. Kaufman, *Nationalist Passions* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2015).

¹⁹ Kaufman, *Nationalist Passions*, 84.

Kaufman, therefore, sees the ethnic conflict in Yugoslavia (and, hence, in Bosnia) as a process driven by the elites who “framed” the issues of the day in existential terms. The masses found the “frames” credible, because of deeply rooted prejudices harbored by the Yugoslav nations towards each other. Focusing on the Serbian case, Kaufman writes that “Slobodan Milošević, for example, was famous for his government-led air war, the onslaught of television propaganda that justified violence by Serbs against Croats and Muslims in defense of the Serbian identity.”²⁰ Kaufman defines „threats“ very broadly to include not just physical threats but also “Social threats—threats to economic interests, group status, or values”.²¹ I find this definition too broad, and therefore unhelpful, as the very concept of „ethnic conflict“, and therefore, „conflict“ implies the notion of threat. But as will emerge in my study of Prijedor, if we want to know the role historical grievances can play in history, we must determine whether “prejudices” are grounded in genuine threats (i.e. in fear for physical safety) or whether they are fueled by resentments (i.e. anger).

As I will argue more fully in the conclusion, security dilemma, or the sense of fear more broadly (whether shaped by the elites or induced by real historical traumas), played a subordinated role in the events. Moreover, the elites rather than “framing” and “leading” the masses, are better thought of as emblematic of the voters they represented.

Michael Mann’s „The dark side of democracy: Explaining ethnic cleansing“ offers a detailed sociological account of violence in the Yugoslav wars. Mann notes how the mass killings in the Second World War bore heavily on all ethnic groups in Bosnia. He narrates how early accounts

²⁰ Kaufman, *Nationalist Passions*, 76. Broadly speaking, Kaufman puts Slobodan Milošević and Franjo Tuđman at the center of the Yugoslav Wars, see Ibid., 72-76.

²¹ Kaufman, *Nationalist Passions*, 82.

of the war in Bosnia discarded that weight as “ancient hatreds” thesis, but emphasizes that “This collective memory, based on a real recent historical core, then amplified by organic nationalism, boosted ethnic cleansing in Yugoslavia – but only after serious political tensions had emerged.”²² He sees the massacres against the Serbs in particular as underpinning the Serb nationalists’ “moral claims” as well as “their hysteria at any sign of a Ustasha revival (for we understand Jewish outrage at swastikas daubed on synagogues)”.²³ On the other hand, he notes the massacres committed by the Chetniks and the SS Handschar division²⁴, and so asserts that “danger threatened because representatives of two rival ethnic communities made sovereign claims on the same territory, their claims being both morally plausible and achievable.”²⁵ Ultimately, however, Mann claims the episodes of ethnic cleansing in Bosnia are best understood as being top driven, as aside from party elites, armed militants, and radicalized nationalists, there never was a majority for ethnic cleansing, and electoral majorities were mobilized for ethnic defense.²⁶ The evidence I present on the political mobilization and the ensuing violence does not entirely support Mann’s thesis that the ethnic cleansing was a top-down process.²⁷ Mann’s drawing attention to the purported “moral claims” of the Serbs as well as his depiction of the conflict as a conflict over territory, however, I find very useful in explicating the legacy of the Second World War on the events in Prijedor in the nineties as I will elaborate below.

²² Michael Mann, *The dark side of democracy: Explaining ethnic cleansing* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 359, 362.

²³ Mann, *The dark side of democracy*, 363.

²⁴ The 13th Waffen Mountain Division of the SS Handschar was a Second World War Nazi German military formation. Formed in 1943, the division was comprised largely of Bosniaks. The division was known for its harsh treatment of local populations and was involved in numerous war crimes.

²⁵ Mann, *The dark side of democracy*, 382.

²⁶ Mann, *The dark side of democracy*, 427.

²⁷ The tricky part of Mann’s claim is that he includes armed militants and “core constituents of nationalists” (radicalized nationalists) in the elites. But obviously these categories can cover a large number of people.

In “Nationalism Reframed: Nationhood and the National Question in the new Europe” Rogers Brubaker dismisses the ancient hatreds thesis, but points out that the mass killings in the Second World War mobilized the Serbs in the runup to the Yugoslav Wars: “But the emphasis on elite manipulation cannot explain why representations of a prospectively independent Croatia as a dangerously nationalizing state were sufficiently resonant, and sufficiently plausible, among certain segments of the Krajina Serb population, to inspire genuine fear and induce militant mobilization, and eventually armed rebellion, against the Croatian regime.”²⁸ The evidence I present in the following chapter supports Brubaker’s assertion that the role of elite manipulation is overemphasized. The evidence does not, however, support his claim that it was fear that mobilized the Serbs in the nineties. In a more theoretically minded account of the wars in Bosnia and Croatia “Creating New States: Theory and Practice of Secession”, Aleksandar Pavković and Petar Radan likewise stress “Serb fears of the revival of Ustasha policies”.²⁹ Laura Silber and Allan Silber similarly trace the influence of the Second World War massacres on the breakup of Yugoslavia to partly real and partly manufactured Serb fears that made it “easy for nationalist leaders to evoke the horror of 1941, and to awaken, in the Serbs, a desire to avenge the sufferings of the past.”³⁰ Striking the same note, Michael Ignatieff writes in “Blood and Belonging: Journeys into the New Nationalism” that “Defenders of the Croatian position insist that these fears were manipulated by Milošević. They certainly were, yet, in the broader context of the collapse of the inter-ethnic Yugoslav state, Serbs had reason to be afraid. War was the result of an interacting spiral of Serbian expansionism, Croatian independence,

²⁸ Rogers Brubaker, *Nationalism reframed: Nationhood and the national question in the new Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 72.

²⁹ Aleksandar Pavković and Peter Radan, *Creating new states: Theory and practice of secession* (Oxfordshire: Routledge Publishing, 2007), 146, 192.

³⁰ Laura Silber and Allan Little, *Yugoslavia: Death of a nation* (New York: Penguin Books, 1997), 92-93.

and Serbian ethnic paranoia in Croatia.”³¹ Again, the logic expounded here is that the Ustasha atrocities against the Serbs made the Serbs afraid of the Croat and Bosniak independency drive, which in turn induced the Serbs to contest that drive with force and victimize the Croats and Bosniaks in turn.

Case Study: Prijedor

Prijedor is a town in Bosnia and Herzegovina, located in the northwest area of the Republika Srpska entity. It has a population of about 100,000 people and covers 834 square kilometers. The town is near Kozara Mountain and the Sana River and its geography includes hills, valleys, and forests. The history of Prijedor goes back to Roman times when it was a key location for travelers and merchants. The town's architecture shows influences from the Ottoman, Austro-Hungarian, and Yugoslavian periods. In the late 15th century, as the Ottoman Empire expanded into the Balkans, Prijedor fell under Ottoman rule. The Ottoman period saw the establishment of various religious and cultural institutions under the *millet* system³², which contributed to the preservation of Prijedor's multireligious character, albeit under the domination of Islam. Prijedor remained under Ottoman control until the end of the nineteenth century when the Austro-Hungarian Empire took over following the Treaty of Berlin in 1878. Under Austro-Hungarian administration, Prijedor experienced substantial development in infrastructure and urban planning. Austro-Hungarian rule in Prijedor lasted until the end of World War I in 1918, when the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes, later renamed the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, was established.

³¹ Michael Ignatieff, *Blood and belonging: Journeys into the new nationalism* (New York: Macmillan, 1994), 52.

³² For the millet system, see Karen Barkey and George Gavrilis. "The Ottoman millet system: Non-territorial autonomy and its contemporary legacy." *Ethnopolitics* 15, no. 1 (2016): 24-42.

The political environment in Royalist Yugoslavia was marked by strife and fragmentation. Nationalist fervor among various ethnic groups ignited feelings of mistrust and animosity.³³ King Alexander I's efforts to quell nationalist sentiments by implementing the January 6th Dictatorship in 1929 only served to intensify the discord. This precarious state of affairs ultimately ended when the Axis powers invaded Yugoslavia in April 1941.³⁴

The Summer of 1941

In 1939, the municipality of Prijedor [srez] had roughly 68 000 inhabitants, of which 40 000 were Serbs, 7 1000 Croat, and 20 000 Bosniaks.³⁵

The first German military units reached the town of Prijedor on April 13 1941. Days before, on April 8 and April 11, Prijedor was bombed by the German aviation. The German Army, following the suggestion of the commander of the Second army, disarmed the members of the Yugoslav armed forces in the Prijedor area, and installed a militia-like force manned by Croats

³³ On the national tensions that permeated the founding of the first Yugoslavia, see Ivo Banac. *The National Question in Yugoslavia: Origins, History, Politics* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988).

³⁴ Max Bergholz in his seminal study on violence in Kulen Vakuf (a municipality in the vicinity of Prijedor) notes the absence of outright interethnic physical violence in that town in the decades preceding the Second World War. We can surmise that the circumstances in Prijedor were not much different. To be sure, the region saw significant violence by the Serbs against the Bosniak landlords in the wake of the founding of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes in 1918 and 1919. Max Bergholz, *Violence as a generative force: Identity, nationalism, and memory in a Balkan community*. (Cornell University Press, 2016), 21-61. On the other hand, however, the primary organizer of violence against the Serbs, Viktor Gutić, hailed from the area, and was clearly radicalized in the interwar years. See the note 36 below.

³⁵ Prior to 1993, Bosniaks were known or registered under different appellations centered around their Islamic beliefs, most commonly expressed as “Bosnian Muslims” or “Muslims” in English. As Bosniaks today prefer overwhelmingly to be called Bosniaks, I stick with that name in this thesis. For more on the evolution of Bosniak identity, see Iva Lucić, “Im Namen Der Nation: Der Politische Aufwertungsprozess Der Muslime Im Sozialistischen Jugoslawien (1956-1971)” [In the name of the nation: the process of political upgrading of Muslims in socialist Yugoslavia (1956-1971 (PhD diss., Acta Universitatis Upsaliensis, 2016).

and, to a lesser extent, Bosniaks to impose order.³⁶ Following the agreement between Italy and Germany on the demarcation line in the newly established the Independent State of Croatia (NDH), Prijedor fell under the German control. By the end of the year, around 800 German soldiers and 700 Ustasha militia were stationed in Prijedor; the 718th division of the German army exercised overall control from Banja Luka.

Who were the Ustasha? The Ustasha were a Croatian far-right, ultranationalist organization active in Yugoslavia between 1929 and 1945. The Ustasha movement was founded in 1929 by Ante Pavelić, a Croatian nationalist who sought to create an independent Croatian state by any means necessary, including the use of terror. The movement owed its existence to a combination of factors, including the resentment of the Serbian domination of the Royal Yugoslavia, the anti-Serbian aspects of the nineteenth century Croatian national ideology, and, most of all, to the support of Italy and Germany. The Ustasha were responsible for assassinating King Alexander of Yugoslavia in 1934, in collaboration with the Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization. When Nazi Germany and its allies invaded and dismembered Yugoslavia in April 1941, they established the NDH, which included modern-day Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina, and parts of Serbia. The Nazis installed the Ustasha as the ruling regime in the puppet state. The Ustasha regime was notorious for its brutal policies of ethnic cleansing, particularly against Serbs, Jews, and Roma who lived in the NDH. The regime established

³⁶ Vedrana Adamović, *Godine stradanja 1941/42. NDH i njeni zločini nad srpskim narodom u Prijedoru i okolini 1941/42. Prilog proučavanju zločina genocida nad srpskim narodom u Potkozarju*[Years of suffering in 1941/42. NDH and its crimes against the Serbian people in and around Prijedor in 1941/42. Contribution to the study of the crime of genocide against the Serbian people in Potkozarje)]. (Prijedor: Muzej Kozare. Arhiv Republike Srpske, 2020), 19-20. In the preceding days, Croat members of the Yugoslav army deserted on mass.

concentration camps, the most infamous of which was Jasenovac, where over a hundred thousand people were killed.³⁷

The atmosphere in Prijedor after the entrance of Ustasha troops in the town was best captured by a Prijedor judge, Muharem Sadiković. Referring to the period between 10 and 14 April, Sadiković writes that:

The citizenry, grouped by their religious beliefs, exhibited the following emotions: the Orthodox depressed and worried, but loyal to German power; the Muslims rejoice, exult Hitler and admire the German military power, while the scum are called the fifth column, they do not show that they are ready to take power into their own hands, and are waiting for the initiative from the Germans. The Catholics shout with delight to Hitler and Pavelić, and as always, led by local parish priests, take power into their own hands.³⁸

The *spiritus movens* of the Ustasha state in Prijedor was Viktor Gutić, a prominent member of the prewar Ustasha party. On June 6, 1941, Gutić assumed the position of commissioner for the Sana–Luka–Krbava–Psat region. He established his reputation for brutality immediately upon taking power, by issuing an order on April 23 mandating that all Serbs and Montenegrins residing in Bosanska Krajina, who were originally born in Serbia or Montenegro, must leave the area within five days.³⁹ Gutić upped the ante on a tour through Prijedor, Sanski Most, and Kozarac by a number of inflammatory speeches against the Serbs.⁴⁰ During his short stay in Zagreb on May 16, Gutić declared that “Now I have to start the grandiose deed of cleansing the Croatian Bosnian Krajina from all undesirable elements, especially in Banja Luka, because that

³⁷ Dragan Cvetković, "Geostatistička analiza ljudskih gubitaka u koncentracionom logoru Jasenovac." [Geostatistical analysis of human losses in the Jasenovac concentration camp] *Istorija 20. veka* 1 (2019): 93-120, 100. On the Ustasha regime see, for example, Jozo Tomasevich, *War and revolution in Yugoslavia, 1941-1945: Occupation and collaboration*. Vol. 2. (Redwood City: Stanford University Press, 2002) and Bogdan Krizman, *Ante Pavelić i ustaše*. [Ante Pavelić and the Ustasha] Vol. 1. (Zagreb: Globus, 1978).

³⁸ The observations from Sadiković, himself a Bosniak, are widely quoted in the secondary literature on the NDH period. For example, Adamović, *Prijedor*, 29 and Tomislav Dulić, „Utopias of Nation: Local Mass Killing in Bosnia and Herzegovina, 1941-42” (PhD diss., Acta Universitatis Upsaliensis, 2005), 227.

³⁹ For more on Gutić, see Vladan Vukliš and Verica M. Stošić, "From the Abyss They Came, into the Abyss They Were Thrown: Crime and Punishment in the WW2 Bosnian Frontier." *Tonina* 3 (2017): 11-46.

⁴⁰ Gutić was accompanied on the tour by Miralembeg Kapetanović, the new mayor of Prijedor.

city will soon become the capital of the Independent State of Croatia”⁴¹. Gutić’s rage a new low in late May during a dinner in Prijedor when he promised that “This Serbian maggots from age 15 upwards we will kill and cleanse, and their children we will put into camps to make them good Catholics.”⁴² The action to force convert the Serbs to Catholicism started on August 10, and reached its peak by the end of the 1941. In only one instance, and trying to avoid the massacres that befell their coreligionists, 15 000 Serbs from Omarska asked to convert on mass on 21 August. The area was at that time military controlled by one Husein Mujagić, a Bosniak Ustasha, from the nearby Kozarac settlement.⁴³

The incarceration of more prominent Serbs started already on 6 May.⁴⁴ In May a draconian tax was levied on the Serbs from Prijedor for the financial needs of the NDH. Moreover, the NDH took full control of all Serb businesses in the area. Serbs, fighting the persecution, overwhelmingly joined the nascent communist-led resistance.⁴⁵

While repression bore heavily on the Serbs in May and June, it was at the end of July that the killings escalated. The Serbian peasants staged an uprising against the Ustasha rule in the surrounding municipalities of Prijedor, threatening to encircle Prijedor itself on July 31. In the following days the Ustasha forces⁴⁶ launched an indiscriminate attack on the Serb civilians. Slavko Dasović, a member of the so-called Kvaternik Guard⁴⁷, exercised overall command over

⁴¹ Adamović, *Prijedor*, 45.

⁴² Adamović, *Prijedor*, 54.

⁴³ Mark Biondich, "Religion and Nation in Wartime Croatia: Reflections on the Ustaša Policy of Forced Religious Conversions, 1941-1942." *The Slavonic and East European Review* 83 (2005): 85. Adamović, *Prijedor*, 56.

⁴⁴ Adamović, *Prijedor*, 36.

⁴⁵ Adamović, *Prijedor*, 17. According to a memorial plank dedicated to the fallen partisans from the Kozara area, over 95% of soldiers were Serbs (roughly 9 000). ICTY, Stakić (IT-97-24), Judgment, para. 46.

⁴⁶ The NDH armed forces consisted of the Croatian Home Guard (Domobrani), the Ustasha army, and police units, for more see Bojan B. Dimitrijević, *Ustaška vojska nezavisne države Hrvatske 1941-1945*. [Ustasha Army of the Independent State of Croatia] (Beograd: Institut za savremenu istoriju Srbije, 2016).

⁴⁷ Slavko Kvaternik (August 25, 1878 – June 7, 1947) was a Croatian military officer and politician who played a significant role in the creation of the Independent State of Croatia (Nezavisna Država Hrvatska, NDH) during

the Ustasha forces stationed in Prijedor. (On 2 July the Ustaha forces were boosted by the arrival of a unit of the Croatian Home Guard troops led by one Josip Zorić).

According to one communist source:

Last week, a massacre was carried out on the peasants from Omarska, Piskavica and surrounding villages. Hundreds and hundreds of peasants were killed. Hundreds of them are here in town, in the prisons; beaten, tortured so that they look more like corpses than living people. In Omarska, they were stuffed into... two pits that were dug up during the last bombings, fifty or hundred on top of each other. They loaded them onto trucks just like sacks and threw them off into the holes. There were living people among them.

Three railway cars full of deportees to Serbia were disconnected in Piskavica and every single one was killed. Many villages in that area are burnt down. Apart from the Ustashe, a number of Muslim and Catholic peasants (a larger number were Catholics and only a few Muslims) took part in these massacres.⁴⁸

The Ustasha made a point of committing the crimes in the broad daylight. A particularly grizzly account of the massacre is recounted by the postwar communist commission that investigated the crimes committed during the war:

Early in the morning on August 1 saw the start of widespread killings, slaughters and excruciations. These killings lasted several days and were carried out in the most brutal ways...The Ustasas blocked the entire town and were spread out on all the streets. Then they started picking up all the Serbs and taking them to prison. When the prison was full, then the wholesale killing began: in the prison, on the streets, in the houses, on the bridge over the Sana, in the park in front of the gymnasium, in the so-called market. 'Žitarice', in the field called 'Urije', in a place called 'Tukovi'. Meanwhile trucks full of peasants kept arriving in Prijedor. There were a lot of corpses and blood on the streets of Prijedor. The corpses were carried in bullock carts and buried in the Serbian and cattle cemeteries. Gypsy women were ordered to clean the streets of blood... Ilija Petrović was put in the middle of the road in the village of Ljubija together with a train driver, Vaso Krnjak, a carpenter and two other brothers, after which the Ustasas stabbed them with knives, cut their ears and fingers, and tortured them until they died.⁴⁹

In the vicinity of Kozarac, nearby the local train station, the Ustasha, led by Husein Mujagić, raided some 13 Serb villages, and massacred the captured villages with axes. From the postwar

World War II. Kvaternik was a prominent member of the Ustasha. On April 10 1941, Kvaternik, in his capacity as a high-ranking Ustasha official, proclaimed the establishment of the NDH on the radio, effectively declaring the end of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia. During the existence of the NDH, Kvaternik held several key positions, including Minister of the Armed Forces and Commander-in-Chief of the Croatian Home Guard.

⁴⁸ Quoted according to Dulić, *Utopias*, 223.

⁴⁹ Quoted according to Adamović, *Prijedor*, 114.

verdict against Viktor Gutić: "In Kozarac 360 people were killed with axes near the train station, after having been beaten with rifles and after having their moustaches pulled out".⁵⁰

Concomitant with the massacres in Prijedor and Kozarac, the Ustasha proceeded to terrorize the Serb villagers from Ljubija. The tone was set by Viktor Gutić. In June he visited Ljubija and held a speech exhorting the Ustasha to "Smack the Serbs's heads with axes – you will be free from any blame, and this earth will want to see the Serb".⁵¹ The killings started on August 1, when a first group of Serb civilians was rounded up and shipped off to Prijedor. Groups of the Ustasha and the Home Guard units spread out across the village and started executing the Serbs they could find. According to the witness testimony of Gojić Ljubica from Donja Ljubija in the proceedings against Sulja Bašić: "(...) When all the Serbs were killed, I came to Mustafa Bašić, the barber, to ask him to allow us to go to the cemetery, and to allow us to transfer all our people to the cemetery and to go to the cemetery to cry. He then answered that we could and we set off, just not to cry (..) we all had to go together and so all the Ustashes followed us from the side..."⁵²

As we have seen, the crimes against the Serbs were committed primarily by the Ustasha forces, manned by Croats and Bosniaks. A large, indeed decisive, role was played by Viktor Gutić who exhorted the local villagers to commit violence against the Serbs, in keeping with the overall goals of the NDH.⁵³ Within some 13 days, roughly 1 500 Serb civilians from the area of

⁵⁰ Adamović, *Prijedor*, 150.

⁵¹ Adamović, *Prijedor*, 170.

⁵² Adamović, *Prijedor*, 173.

⁵³ For more on the overall policy goals of the NDH, see Rory Yeomans, "The Ustaša regime and the politics of terror in the independent state of Croatia, 1941–1945." in *The Routledge Handbook of Balkan and Southeast European History*, eds. John R. Lampe and Ulf Brunnbauer (Oxfordshire: Routledge, 2020), 383–391 and Michele

Prijedor were killed.⁵⁴ By the end of the war, more than 4 000 Serb civilians were killed. While there were individual Croats and Bosniaks who helped their Serb neighbors, most played the role of “bystanders” or active participants. The one exception is represented by a resolution issued by the district commission for vakifs and schools in Prijedor, condemned the Ustasha violence on September 23 in 1941.⁵⁵

Communist Intermezzo?

More than 40 years separated the events in the Second World War from the outbreak of violence in Bosnia in 1992. Since most of the political and military leadership of the Serbs from Prijedor were born after 1945,⁵⁶ the impact and how the Prijedor Serbs understood the massacres in 1941-1945 was mediated by the Communist policy with regard to the “national question”.

The conclusion of the Second World War saw substantial shifts in the nature of the national question. With the solidification of Communist rule, dialogues regarding national relations became increasingly confined to the regime's official propaganda. In the majority of Yugoslavia, the fervor of the interwar and occupation periods was replaced by indifference towards the issues that previously stoked national animosities. While the national feelings were

Frucht Levy, ““The Last Bullet for the Last Serb”:The Ustaša Genocide against Serbs: 1941–19452.” *Nationalities Papers* 37, no. 6 (2009): 807-837.

⁵⁴ Adamović, *Prijedor*, 110.

⁵⁵ Marko Hoare Attila, *The History of Bosnia. From the Middle Ages to the Present Day*. (London: Saqi Books, 2007), 207. The resolution was not, however, without sinister undertones. The resolution adopted the persecutory Ustasha practice of recognizing the Serbs only as members of “Greek Eastern religion” and was primarily focused on resisting the Ustasaha pressures on the Bosniaks themselves; above all, the resolution downplayed and misrepresented the considerable Bosniaks participation in the local Ustasha forces. See Dulić, *Utopias*, 232. Dulić is also critical of the term „bystanders“ and suggests a more flexible term „bystander behavior“. According to Dulić, the activities of the revolutionists can both be viewed as helping the victims as well as supporting the Ustasha regime. Ibid, 360-364.

⁵⁶ Srđa Srdić, however, is an exception, as he was born in 1927.

by no means extinguished, the national tensions drastically subdued. The Communist pursued a multi-prong strategy to tackle national grievances. First, they engaged in the wholesale destruction, often involving extra-judicial killings, of all collaborationist forces, above all the Ustasha and Chetnik forces. Second, the expressions both official and unofficial, of nationalistic feelings were closely monitored and stringently censored. Third, the Communist adopted a new institutional framework for Bosnia that defined the republic as being “co-owned” by all three ethnic groups. Finally, the Communist espoused a new ideology of „brotherhood and unity” that offered all ethnic groups a new collective identity based on their purported common struggle against the enemies as well as their aspiration toward a new, socialist Yugoslavia.

The Communists were helped by the general exhaustion of the populace caused by the hardships and the horrors of war. The nationalistic sentiments in the immediate post-war years found little support among the people who wanted above all a respite from violence.⁵⁷ Moreover, and speaking of the resentments of the Bosnian Serbs, the Communist rule indirectly accommodated them as they were overrepresented in the Communist bureaucracy due to their higher participation in the partisan ranks.⁵⁸

⁵⁷ Paul Shoup, *Communism and the Yugoslav National Question* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1968), 101.

⁵⁸ Sevan Pearson, "The “national key” in Bosnia and Herzegovina: a historical perspective." *Nationalities Papers* 43, no. 2 (March 2015): 213-232. However, their overrepresentation eventually clashed with the policy promoting equality among different ethnic groups in Bosnia, leading to a gradual decline in their numerical supremacy within the party.

Towards the end of the nineteen-fifties, however, the Communist policy changed.⁵⁹ First, smaller Yugoslav nations balked at what they saw was an imposition of a centralist Yugoslav identity that looked similar to the integral Yugoslav identity unsuccessfully imposed by the Royalist Yugoslavia. As Shoup writes:

There simply was no Yugoslav theater, Yugoslav ballet, or Yugoslav Academy of Sciences. In the field of history, the Partisan campaigns were the only subject in the curriculum of the schools which dealt with the common problems and shared experiences of the Yugoslav peoples, and even in this case the tendency was to present the resistance movement as a struggle for the liberation of the nationality of the republic in question, rather than as an all-Yugoslav affair.

To have placed more emphasis on Yugoslav themes in the fields of culture and education would have run the risk of associating the Party with the practice of cultural and national assimilation, and this the Communists were determined to avoid at all costs.⁶⁰

Second, the constitutional framework of Yugoslavia moved towards the devolution of powers towards the constituent republics, that were now more openly defined in national terms. In the case of Bosnia, this meant an ever-greater separation of the Bosnian Serbs from Yugoslavia and thus Serbia.

The reign of Communism led to significant transformations in social and economic realms, most notably in the surge of urbanization and the enhancement of educational achievements. How did these changes affect the national question? The high rate of interethnic marriage in bigger Bosnian towns worked to calm national tensions⁶¹, and higher education achievements and a greater abundance of white-collar jobs tended to do the same. Xavier Bougarel, for example, writes that in 1948 78% of the population in Yugoslavia lived on farms, and only 27%

⁵⁹ On the evolution of the Communist Yugoslav policy see Pedro Ramet, *Nationalism and Federalism in Yugoslavia, 1963-1983* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982), 55-57.

⁶⁰ Shoup, *Communism and the Yugoslav National Question*, 123. Shoup claims that the abandonment of an active pursuit of a Yugoslav identity and the ossification of the national character of the republican bodies incidentally contributed to the persistence of national differences. Ibid.

⁶¹ Leonard Kukić, "The last Yugoslavs: ethnic diversity, national identity and civil war." *LSE Economic History Working Papers* No. 300 (October 2019): 9.

in 1981.⁶² But the rapid modernization seems to have been skin-deep. In central Bosnia, for instance, interethnic marriage rate was still very low in the 19eighties.⁶³ Moreover, as Bougarel writes, the rapid urbanization shifted the thick ethnic mentality of the countryside into the towns themselves.⁶⁴ This is consistent with what happened in Prijedor. The rate of interethnic marriage stood at roughly 12% in 1991, in line with 11% for the whole of Bosnia.⁶⁵ White-collar professions were overrepresented among the key perpetrators in Prijedor. Srđa Srdić, Milomir Stakić and Milan Kovačević (Stakić's deputy) were physician. Srdić's son, moreover, was married to a Bosniak. Anecdotally, at least, one can say that the primary socialization of most of the key perpetrators happened in the countryside (Stakić, Drljača and Kovačević were all born in the hamlets in the Prijedor municipality).

Sabrina Ramet in her "*Nationalism and Federalism in Yugoslavia, 1963-1983*" claims that although the Communist policy towards the "pacification" of the nationalist sentiments was successful during the Cold War-era, the policy was ultimately a failure. She writes "Yet, although the Yugoslavs have assured a commendable degree of stability among their ethnic groups, they have not, ultimately, succeeded in "solving" the national question. Their own admission that installation of multiparty democracy would risk aggravation of ethnic frictions (or, as they put it, that it would inevitably promote the disintegration of the country) betrays an awareness that national self-consciousness has never been far below the surface in

⁶² Xavier Bougarel, "Yugoslav wars: the revenge of the countryside between sociological reality and nationalist myth." *East European Quaterly* 33, no. 2 (June 1999): 165.

⁶³ Robert M. Hayden, "Moral vision and impaired insight: The imagining of other peoples' communities in Bosnia." *Current Anthropology* 48, no. 1 (February 2007): 111.

⁶⁴ Bougarel, *Yugoslav wars*, 165.

⁶⁵ Popis Stanovništva 1991: Porodice u Republici Bosni i Hercegovini, Rezultati za Republiku i po Opštinama/ Općinama [Population Census 1991: Families in the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Results for the Republic by Municipality/Municipalities], Sarajevo: Federalni Zavod za Statistiku, 9, 85. By contrast, Banja Luka's rate was almost 25% and Sarajevo's 19%. Ibid, p.22 and p.10.

Yugoslavia.”⁶⁶ Similar views are held by Paul Shoup who writes that “A more accurate picture of the situation would have to take into the account the fact that, while the prewar national groups were largely, paralyzed, traditional national attitudes remained largely unchanged. How deeply entrenched these sentiments were was to become apparent later years, not through the appearance of anti-Communist organizations, but in the adoption of local national outlooks by the Communis themselves.”⁶⁷

From the point of view of this thesis, the key issue revolves around not just how the Communists tried to shape the legacy of the Second World War, but what the Serbs in the Cold War period understood the consequences of the massacres to be for their own relation toward the Yugoslav state in general, and Bosnia in particular. As pointed out in the academic literature, the strong ethnic mobilization in the eighties and early nineties revealed that the Communists’s national policy was a failure. But why? Partly the failure can be explained by the noted skin-deep modernization in Bosnia, that failed to turn the Serbs, Croats, and Bosniaks into engineers and bartenders. On a deeper level, however, the policy was a failure because it made no attempts to solve what the ethnic groups themselves perceived as at the core of the national problem: conflicting territorial claims of Yugoslav nations.⁶⁸ James Gow in his review of the possible explanations of Yugoslavia’s demise, only briefly touches on the weight of the Second World War atrocities, in particular those perpetrated by the Ustasha against the Serbs.

⁶⁶ Ramet, *Nationalism and Federalism in Yugoslavia*, 234-235.

⁶⁷ Shoup, *Communism and the Yugoslav National Question*, 110.

⁶⁸ An obvious objection to this line of reasoning is that the Slovenes, whose territorial claims were uncontested by other Yugoslav nations, were among the most vocal advocates for loosening the ties among the Yugoslav nations in eighties. But while the Slovene nationalism contributed to the breakup of Yugoslavia, it was both inflamed and sustained by the Serb nationalism, which in turn owned its potency to unresolved territorial claims in Kosovo, Bosnia, and Croatia. On the Slovene nationalism in the eighties see Jasna Dragović-Soso, *Saviours of the nation: Serbia's intellectual opposition and the revival of nationalism*. (Montreal: McGill-Queen's Press-MQUP, 2002), 162-195.

He notes that the key weakness of the Communists' national policy consisted in not forcing the Croats to come to terms with the crimes committed in their name, which accounting "would have done much to prevent an implicit collective guilt just as the Nuremburg trials assisted in rehabilitating Germany after the Nazi period."⁶⁹ However, he fails to consider the possibility that in the eyes of the Serbs, and the Bosnian Serbs in particular, coming to terms with the past necessarily involved the Croats' and Bosniaks' relinquishing of territorial claims either in the form of reduced sovereignty (i.e. Bosnia as part of Yugoslavia) or in the form of complete loss of sovereignty over the territories where the Serbs were the majority. That is, from the point of view of the Serbs, the rehabilitation of Germany did not just involve the Nuremburg trials but the territorial losses in the eastern parts of Germany as well. One can say, however, that the Communists' implicit response was in part expressed through their stress on the violence perpetrated by the Chetniks in the Second World War, as well as their emphasis on the attempts of the Serbian elites to political dominate other Yugoslav peoples in the Royal Yugoslavia: in the eyes of the Communists' both facts relativized the Serbs' morally grounded territorial claims.

Finally, the Communists pushed back against the Serbs' claims over Bosnia both by weakening the powers of the federal authorities and by strengthening the competencies of the republics, but they did nothing to dissuade the Serbs of the belief that Bosnia's sovereignty is contingent on Yugoslavia's. It was this strategic ambiguity exercised by the Communists about the status of the republics, that resulted in sidestepping rather than resolving the national question.⁷⁰

⁶⁹ James Gow, "After the Flood: Literature on the Context, Causes and Courses of the Yugoslav War – Reflections and Refractions." *Slavonic and East European Review* 75, no. 3 (July 1997): 450. A similar point with more force, and equally incomplete, is made by Ignatieff, *Blood and Belonging*, 62-63.

⁷⁰ Needless to say, I ignore here entirely how feasible such clear-cut national policy would have been, given how strong both the centrifugal and the centripetal forces in Yugoslavia were. On the ambiguous nature of the 1974

As I will try to show in the next chapter, the crimes against the Serbs in Bosnia, in Prijedor, reinforced the Prijedor Serbs' belief that the land they inhabit ought to be theirs.

The Summer of 1992

When the Bosnian War erupted in April 1992, the municipality of Prijedor had about 112 000 inhabitants, of which 49 000 were Bosniaks, 47 500 were Serbs, and 7 500 Croats. By the end of the war in 1995, 4 400 civilians were killed. More precisely, 3 428 male and 391 female civilians were killed during the war. Of that number, Bosniaks comprised 3 515. By contrast, only 127 Bosniak soldiers died during the war.⁷¹

How did they die? Who killed them? Why? In the chapter I first lay out the Bosnian Serb political preparations for the takeover of the municipality, and then focus on the involvement of the military units of the Bosnian Serb army in the crimes committed during the spring and summer of 1992, as well as on the role played by the local political leadership.

In December of 1991, the main Bosnian Serb political party "Serbian Democratic Party", instructed all its municipal branches to prepare plans for the takeover of power in their respective areas.⁷² This document provided instructions for the organization and activity of the Serbian people in Bosnia and Herzegovina under "extraordinary circumstances". The stated

constitution, see Robert M. Hayden, "The beginning of the end of Federal Yugoslavia: the Slovenian amendment crisis of 1989." *The Carl Beck Papers in Russian and East European Studies* 1001 (1992): 4.

⁷¹ Tokača, *Bosanska knjiga mrtvih*, 175-179.

⁷² ICTY, Krajisnik (IT-00-39), "Instructions for the organization and activity of the organs of the Serbian people in BiH in extraordinary circumstances dated Sarajevo, 19 December 1991 (English, 8 Pages)", Exhibit P43.1

goal of the instructions was to prevent the separation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, and thereby the Serbian people, from Yugoslavia. The measures primarily aimed to prepare logistically and organizationally the takeover of all Bosnian municipalities deemed as “Serb” by the Serbian Democratic Party. The instructions were divided into two variants, "A" and "B", each with two stages. Variant "A" pertained to municipalities where Serbs were a majority. The Stage One of Variant A included tasks such as forming a crisis staff of the Serbian people in the municipality, preparing for the protection of vulnerable groups, reinforcing combat units, protecting important resources, and ensuring continued production and operation of vital services. The Stage Two of Variant A included tasks such as mobilizing all Serbian members of the police forces, ensuring the implementation of the order to mobilize reserve Yugoslav People's Army (JNA) forces, and taking over the staff, premises, and equipment of the security services center. Notably, the instructions also called for “respect for the national and other rights of members of all peoples and, subsequently, ensure their involvement in the administrative authorities to be set up by the assembly of the Serbian people in the municipality.” The content of the Variant B was essentially the same, except for the provision “ensure proportionate representation in government organs of members of other nations and nationalities who have expressed their loyalty to federal Yugoslavia.” The provision was ominous and certainly more forceful than the content of the Variant A. As the Variant B pertained to municipalities where Serbs were a minority, such provisions could not but have anticipated coercive measures against the Bosniaks and Croats in those municipalities.

Why did the Serbian Democratic Party adopt such policy in the first place? As we have seen, the stated goal was to stop the territorial separation of Bosnian Serbs from Yugoslavia, that is,

from Serbia proper. According to Herbert Okun, a Turkish diplomat, Radovan Karadžić⁷³ in a meeting with himself and Cyrus Vance⁷⁴ voiced concerns over the perceived intention of Bosniaks to dominate all of Bosnia, believing that they planned to leverage their greater birth rate to accomplish this. Additionally, he warned that if Bosnian-Serb municipalities did not legally align with Yugoslavia, it could lead to a war.⁷⁵ The views undergirding the political goals of the SDS were succinctly expressed in a resolution adopted on the same day as the mentioned Instructions. The document, titled "View on the Right to Self-Determination of the Serbian People in Bosnia and Herzegovina", was issued by the Assembly of the Serbian People in Bosnia and Herzegovina on December 19, 1991.⁷⁶ It outlines what the SDS saw as the historical context of Yugoslavia and its peoples' right to self-determination. The text argues that Yugoslavia was created through the voluntary union of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes, based on the principle of self-determination, and that, moreover, the Constitution of the Socialist Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina recognizes Bosniaks, Serbs, and Croats as equal constitutive peoples. Tellingly, the declaration concludes by warning that "That is why no decision [on the status of Bosnia] can be made without the agreement of all other factors [peoples], in order to find a just solution. Any other viewpoint would bring into question the

⁷³ Born on June 19, 1945, in Petnjica, Montenegro, Radovan Karadžić is a trained psychiatrist, who served as the President of Republika Srpska during the Bosnian War between 1992 and 1996. He co-founded the Serb Democratic Party in Bosnia and Herzegovina and was a leading figure in the Bosnian Serb leadership during the Bosnian War. After the war, Karadžić went into hiding and was indicted by the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) on charges of genocide, crimes against humanity, and violations of the laws or customs of war. He evaded capture for over a decade until his arrest in Serbia in 2008, where he had been living under an assumed identity. In 2016, the ICTY found him guilty of genocide for the 1995 Srebrenica massacre. He was sentenced to 40 years in prison, which was later increased to life imprisonment on appeal in 2019.

⁷⁴ Cyrus Vance (1917-2002) was an American legal professional and public servant who held the position of United States Secretary of State from 1977 to 1980 during President Jimmy Carter's administration. Before this, he served as the U.S. Secretary of the Army and later as Deputy Secretary of Defense under President Lyndon B. Johnson. His diplomatic endeavors included involvement in peace negotiations in multiple regions, notably in the former Yugoslavia during the early 1990s.

⁷⁵ ICTY, Krajisnik (IT-00-39), "Okun's diary, entry for 2 December 1991", Exhibit P210.

⁷⁶ ICTY, Krajisnik (IT-00-39), "View of Serbian people rights for self determination presented in Bosnian Serb Assembly, 19 Dec 1991.", Exhibit P65.64.1.

national and physical survival of the Serbian people in Bosnia and Herzegovina, who in recent history have been exposed to one of the worst genocides and policies of forced resettlement in Europe.” On the one hand, the SDS used the genocidal violence perpetrated against the Bosnian Serbs in the Second World War to establish territorial claims, based on purported security concerns. But on the other hand, and tellingly, the bulk of the declaration amounts to an effort to establish territorial claims based on purported historical rights of Serbian people from Bosnia that predated the Second World War.

On the last day of 1991, Alija Izetbegović⁷⁷ gave an interview to the *Oslobođenje* newspaper. In this conversation, he called for the creation of a sovereign and independent Bosnia-Herzegovina. The following day Radovan Karadžić and Momčilo Krajišnik⁷⁸ exchanged their views in an intercepted telephone conversation.

Karadžić Radovan: Fuck, he's [A. Izetbegović] really crazy. He now openly talks of a sovereign and independent Bosnia.

Krajišnik Momcilo: Yeah.

Karadžić Radovan: You know, that...

Krajišnik Momcilo: Yeah.

Karadžić Radovan: It was until recently ... fuck him. We will release our tigers and let them do their job.

Krajišnik Momcilo: Yeah, can you imagine this impertinence.

Karadžić Radovan: Fuck. I've.. we've been calming the Serb people for a year because of his foolishness. What can I do? I will not be calming anyone anymore, nor can I.

Krajišnik Momcilo: No, but he says ... we don't want ... this isn't an independent ... that's not a state, he says, it's a sovereign ... so it is equal in the talks, now he says independent, fucking... They really are crazy. Europe is crazy too if they think this can be so. Man, this is impossible, this ... I don't think there's a man who could turn the situation around now and make it so.

Karadžić Radovan:- Nah. nah.

Krajišnik Momcilo: Nah, they are crazy man.

⁷⁷ Alija Izetbegović (1925-2003) was a Bosnian politician, lawyer, and author. In 1988, Izetbegović co-founded the Party of Democratic Action (SDA), a political party primarily representing Bosniaks. He became the Chairman of the Presidency of the Socialist Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina in 1990 and held the position until 1992 when the Socialist Republic was succeeded by the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Izetbegović was then elected as the President of the Republic, a position he held until 2000.

⁷⁸ Momčilo Krajišnik (1945-2020) was a co-founder of the Serb Democratic Party (SDS) alongside Radovan Karadžić. Between 1990 and 1992, he held the position of speaker for the People's Assembly of Republika Srpska, and also served on the expanded Presidency of Republika Srpska from June to December 1992. Krajišnik was charged and found guilty by the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia in 2006 for his involvement in crimes against humanity during the Bosnian War. For these crimes, he was given a prison term of 20 years.

Karadžić Radovan: No way. We need to release those people [the Serb armed forces], we shouldn't hold them back.⁷⁹

The exchange underlines the significance of the feeling of anger rather than of fear among the Bosnian Serb political leadership. As the use of the term “impertinence” signals, the Bosnian Serb felt wronged and thus morally outraged with the Bosniak’s desire to separate Bosnia, and thus the Serbs from Bosnia, from Yugoslavia (i.e. from Serbia). Moreover, the intention to “release the tigers” clearly signaled a will to impose violence on the Bosniaks. In fact, Radovan Karadžić’s rage was already in evidence in September 1991, as a crisis between the Serbs and the Bosniaks erupted in Bratunac, a small town in the eastern Bosnia. On September 3, local Serbs ambushed a car with four Bosniaks. In the process, two Bosniaks were killed and two were wounded.⁸⁰ Following the shootings, Karadžić and Krajišnik discussed the matter:

Radovan Kardžić: We'll make our point, you see, that's where it leads, where your policies lead!!!

Momčilo Krajišnik: Exactly.

Radovan Kardžić: "Can you see where this leads?" and "Do you realise that you will disappear in all this?!!"

Momčilo Krajišnik: Exactly.

Radovan Kardžić: "Man, you will disappear. Many of us will also disappear, but you will be annihilated!"

Momčilo Krajišnik: No, we should say that we will all disappear, both sides, you know

Radovan Kardžić: True.

Momčilo Krajišnik: We should deliberately say this.

Radovan Kardžić: Exactly.

Momčilo Krajišnik: That's what should be done.⁸¹

The fiery rhetoric and propensity to violence of the top Bosnian Serb political leadership, therefore, contributed to the eruption of violence in the spring of 1992. Following the above mentioned instruction, the Prijedor branch of the party founded the “Assembly of the Serbian People of the Prijedor municipality” thus effectively dividing the municipality in two. Milomir

⁷⁹ ICTY, Krajišnik (IT-00-39), *Judgment*, para. 104, Exhibit P403.B.

⁸⁰ Robert Donia, *Radovan Karadžić. Architect of the Bosnian Genocide* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 102.

⁸¹ ICTY, Karadzic and Mladic (IT-95-5/18), “Intercepted Telephone Conversation between Momcilo KRAJISNIK and Radovan KARADZIC, 4 September 1991”, Exhibit P03200.E.

Stakić⁸², a leading local member of the SDS in Prijedor, played a prominent role in the Serb takeover of the municipality and the subsequent violent events. Together with Vladimir Arsić, the commander of the Prijedor group, the SDS formed the “crisis staff” in order to operationalize the policy of the SDS.

On 30 April 1992, the Serb civilian and military authorities marched into the city center, while a number of smaller armed units of the OGP occupied key infrastructure points such as the local post office, the seat of the municipal administration, the local police headquarters, and the facilities of the local radio station.

The takeover of the city was bloodless.⁸³ In the following days, however, the crisis staff instituted a number of discriminatory measures against the non-Serb population of Prijedor. Apart from a general curfew, the Bosniaks and Croats were only granted a limited freedom of movement. Moreover, they were fired from all the leading posts in the city administration. Finally, a number of Bosniaks and Croats were taken for interrogation and later transferred to the infamous prison camps of Trnopolje and Keraterm.⁸⁴

The Bosnian Serb army was organized in six army corps. The First Krajina corps was the largest and most experienced of the six corps. Its area of responsibility stretched from the river Sava in the north, the river Una in the west, and the river Bosna in the east. The corps was responsible for the territory that included major urban centers, chief amongst them the cities of

⁸² Milomir Stakić, born on January 17 1962, is a Bosnian Serb politician and former President of the Prijedor Municipality in Bosnia. In 2003, the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia convicted him of crimes against humanity and war crimes committed during the Bosnian War. Stakić was initially sentenced to life imprisonment, but his sentence was later reduced on appeal to 40 years.

⁸³ According to Tokača, up to 10 Bosniak civilians were killed on or before April 30. I have cross-referenced their names with other available sources, and have concluded that they have been killed in May and June 1992. Mirsad Tokača, *Bosanska knjiga mrtvih, Tom I*. [Bosnian book of the Dead] (Sarajevo: Istraživačko-dokumentacioni centar, 2012), 7-116.

⁸⁴ Kolarić, *Dosije*, 24.

Banja Luka and Prijedor. Of paramount significance for what was to follow, was that fact that Prijedor was almost evenly split between the Bosniaks and the Serbs.

Apart from regular army units, the corps had combat control over the Serb police forces, Territorial Defense forces, and a number of volunteer detachments. Prior to its engagement in Prijedor, the corps saw battle in Croatia in the fall and winter of 1991. In fact, a large proportion of its forces was still engaged in Croatia in the spring of 1992, just as the fighting in Bosnia erupted into open war.

In mid-May 1992, the corps ordered all armed forces under its area of responsibility to submit to its authority. On the basis of this order, Vladimir Arsić, the commander of the 43th brigade, unified all Serb armed forces on the territory of the Prijedor municipality under his command. The grouping was called „Operational-Tactical Group Prijedor“ (OGP). During June, the group was reinforced with the 6th infantry brigade, that operated out of a nearby Ključ municipality.⁸⁵ Immediately after the events of April 30 and fearing a repetition, the Bosniak settlements in the municipality erected barricades on the roads leading into their villages, and set up armed patrols to supervise traffic. The violent clash was at that point preprogrammed. To illustrate how the troops of the OTG Prijedor behaved in the conflict, the fate of the Bosniak villages Hambarine and Kozarac is instructive.

Hambarine had a population of little over 2 800, consisting almost entirely of the Bosniaks. On 22 May, a Serb army vehicle was stopped on a road bypassing the village. After the Serb

⁸⁵ Kolarić, Jovana: *Dosije 43. motorizovana brigada VRS u Prijedoru*. [The Dossier of the 43rd motorised brigade VRS in Prijedor] Beograd: Fond za humanitarno pravo, 2021

soldiers refused to lay down their weapons, two of the soldiers were shot dead on the spot. The same evening, the OTG Prijedor issued an ultimatum to the Bosniaks to hand over their weapons as well as the ones responsible for the deaths of the two Serb soldiers. The Bosniaks refused. The next morning, the OTG Prijedor launched an assault on the village, supported by heavy guns, armored vehicles and tanks. After a short fight, the OTG Prijedor broke through the front lines and captured the village center. Already during the fighting, the Bosniak houses were torched and a number of Bosniak civilians killed. A large group of civilians fled to neighboring villages, while some fled to a nearby forest Kurevo. The forest was subsequently bombed by the OTG Prijedor artillery. In the following days, the Bosniak civilians returned to their homes, only to endure a continuing harassment of the Serb forces that visited the village in the coming weeks.⁸⁶

Kozarac is a Bosniak village in the vicinity of the city of Prijedor.⁸⁷ Situated on the road connecting Prijedor with Banja Luka, the regional center, the village was of prime strategic importance. Following the attack on Hambarine, the OTG Prijedor informed the village heads that a military convoy will pass through the village on its way to Banja Luka. The ultimatum also ordered the villagers to hand in their weapons. The village heads refused. On 24 May, the OTG Prijedor assaulted the village, following the script established in their attack on Hambarine. Long guns flattened the village, while the OTG assault detachments captured the key topographical features in the area. On 26 May, and unlike in the case of Hambarine, the OTG Prijedor units assembled all villagers and separated men from women and children. The

⁸⁶ Kolarić, *Dosije*, 27.

⁸⁷ For a more detailed description of the planning of the attack on Kozarac see Jasmin Medić, „Pripreme, tok i razmjera napada na Kozarac 1992. godine“ [Preparations, Course and Scale of the Attack on Kozarac in 1992] *Prilog* 45 (2016): 297-313.

men were sent into Keraterm and Omarska⁸⁸ prison camps, while the women were shipped off to the Trnopolje prison camp. A group of around 100 Bosniak from a hamlet Kervalje managed to escape the attack, but surrendered in the morning next day. The prisoners were transported to a nearby military facility “Benkovac” located on the mountain Kozara. A Serb soldier, Romanić, separated four Bosniaks from the group, after which they were executed by rifle fire in an adjacent building. During the rest of the day, about 60 Bosniaks were taken to a nearby forest after which they were executed.⁸⁹

In the following days a number of other Bosniak-majority settlements were attacked in a similar fashion. According to the judgment of the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia in the case of Duško Tadić, up to 800 Bosniak civilians were killed in the assault on Kozarac, Kozaruša, Trnopolje and Kamičani.⁹⁰

On 30 May, about 100 Bosniak soldiers led by Slavko Ećimović tried to stage a coup and recapture the city of Prijedor.⁹¹ Already during the morning hours the OTG Prijedor crushed the assault, apprehended Ećimović, and subjected the Bosniak populated parts of the city to artillery barrage. Bosniaks were ordered to mark their houses with white pieces of cloth. Soldiers of the OTG Prijedor arrested the Bosniak and Croatian civilians, put them on parked buses, and sent them to prison camps.

⁸⁸ On the Omarska camp, see Jasmin Medić. „Otac, čuvaj mi djecu...” – Zločini u logoru Omarska 1992. Godine“ [Father, take care of my children...-Crimes in the Omarska camp in 1992] *Prilozi* 46 (2017): 243-267.

⁸⁹ Kolarić, Dosije, 29.

⁹⁰ ICTY, Tadić (IT-94-1), judgment, par. 565.

⁹¹ Amir Kličo. „Prilog proučavanju stradanja Bošnjaka i Hrvata Prijedora 1992.“ [Contribution to the Study of the Suffering of the Bosniaks and Croats from Prijedor 1992] *Radovi Historija, Historija umjetnosti, Arheologija* (2014): 348.

The attack on Prijedor by the Bosniak forces energized the OTG Prijedor. In the following two months practically all Bosniak and Croat settlements were captured and then annihilated. Women and children were sent to the Trnopolje camp and the men to Omarska and Keraterm camps. The killings of prisoners in the camps started as soon as the first prisoners entered the camps. By the end of summer, the Prijedor municipality was “cleared” of its Bosniak and Croat populations, with over 4 000 dead civilians buried in several hundred mass graves scattered across Prijedor.

A particularly grizzly fate befell the inhabitants of the village Zecovi. On 23 July, the members of the 6th company of the 43rd brigade entered the village, ostensibly in search of the weapons the Bosniaks might be hiding. The villagers knew the soldiers well, as the 6th company was formed by the Serbs from the adjacent village Rasanovci. The soldiers found no weapons, and the Bosniaks offered no armed resistance. During the search, the soldiers first lined up and shot dead eight Bosniak civilians. Later during the day, the members of the company executed a number of civilians near the village school. All the men were arrested and sent to the prison camps. The soldiers, moreover, raped a number of Bosniak women. Two days after the first attack, the soldiers returned. As the village was emptied of men, the remaining women and children hid in the basement of the houses in the village. The soldiers found 29 women and children and executed them on the spot. During the war, 69 Bosniak civilians were killed in Zecovi, 20 more in the surroundings of the village, 30 civilians died as prisoners in the prison camps, and 30 more after fleeing the initial assault on the village.⁹²

On 21 August 1992, around 200 Bosniak and Croat men were brutally executed at Korićani Cliffs on Vlašić Mountain, central Bosnia, by Bosnian Serb police forces. These victims were

⁹² Kolarić, *Dosije*, 44.

part of a larger group of roughly 1,200 civilians being moved from the Trnopolje detention camp towards Travnik. At Korićani Cliffs, the police separated roughly 200 men, led them to the brink of the cliff, and subsequently shot them. Their bodies were then thrown into the ravine.⁹³

We have seen how the top Bosnian Serb leadership shaped the political climate in the months before the war, and how the military or security operations of the Serb armed forces resulted in the massive crimes committed against the Bosniak and Croat civilians from Prijedor. What was the role of the local Serb political leadership from Prijedor? Who exactly were the perpetrators of violence? In order to get a better grip on the nature of the perpetrators of particular interest is the official note addressed to the command of the Prijedor group on August 22 by none other than the command of the First Krajina corps.⁹⁴ The note starts as follows:

"The situation in Prijedor can be summed up in the following sentence: never less discipline, never more waywardness! This has brought the municipality to the verge of anarchy...Lack of unity within the Military Police is increasingly difficult to conceal. Heading the Military Police Company are Lieutenant Mile Jović and his deputy Milos Preradović. They both have bad reputations...Lieutenant Rajko Vučićević, commander of the Command Security Platoon, and his unit are pitted against them. It is generally considered that Vučićević's platoon contains the best and the most decent military policemen in Prijedor. The animosity between these units is obvious, and Vučićević's men do not hide the reason for it, openly refusing to be placed under the command of the people who they consider have sullied the public image of military policemen...The Reconnaissance and Sabotage Company...has an especially bad name in Prijedor. Its members are nowadays best known for demolishing catering establishments in Prijedor, and in their last rampage they wrecked eight cafes owned by persons of Serbian nationality. On that occasion the Military Police Intervention Platoon was disarmed by members of the Reconnaissance and Sabotage Company, which has been joined since Karlica's death by dealers and war profiteers. This company with numerous murders of civilians, looting, private murders, etc. Its members also stood out in the mopping-up action in Čarakovo by killing civilians, ripping earrings from women's ears, etc."

The document expresses the frustration of the command of the First Krajina corps with the lack of discipline in the OTG Prijedor. The command lays the blame squarely on the Reconnaissance and Sabotage company of the 43rd brigade. But more revealing is the comment

⁹³ Jasmin Medić, "Ovdje mijenjamo mrtve za mrtve: masakr na Korićanskim stijenama." [Here We Exchange the Dead for the Dead - The Korićani Cliffs Massacre] *PREGLED-časopis za društvena pitanja* 59, no. 2 (2018): 113-128.

⁹⁴ ICTY, Brđanin (IT-99-36), Command of the 1st Krajina Corps, 397-366/1-92, 22 August 1992, exhibit P1455

on the inability of the military police company to establish order in the brigade. The company was first sabotaged by criminal elements inside its ranks, and was, moreover, unable to overpower the sheer military strength of the reconnaissance company. This tells us that, first, the Serb army contained lawful elements willing to observe the Geneva convention and other norms governing warfare. Secondly, even the military police, i.e. the unit responsible for stopping war crimes from happening and apprehending war criminals, was staffed partly by war criminals. Thirdly, the key element involved in the killings of civilians were assault detachments of regular army units. This is, of course, not surprising as such units by nature first come into contact with enemy's civilians, and moreover comprise „trigger-happy“ soldiers.

The note continues:

“Another interesting item - all are now washing their hands regarding camps and reception centers, attempting to pass responsibility for issuing orders for mass execution of civilians in the camps and centers onto someone else. This has become particularly noticeable since the visit of foreign reporters to Prijedor, more precisely to Omarska and Trnopolje. The impression is that the local Fatherland Front is involved in all this. One thing is certain: we are already starting to feel the cost of the needless spilling of Muslim blood. There is information, that Muslims driven out of the municipality of Prijedor, and those who fled to the other side, but who had done nothing against the Serbian Republic before, are now taking up arms in Croatia and joining the war against us. “

The command expresses regret for having to feel the cost of the “needless spilling of Muslim blood”. But let us note one thing the note entirely fails to address. As we have seen, the bulk of the killings happened during the combat engagements, and later on in the prison camps. In other words, rules of engagement of the OTG Prijedor, in particular indiscriminate artillery fire, unlawful detention, and wholesale imprisonment of Bosniak and Croat civilians were instrumental in the resulting war crimes: the rules of engagement were set, or at the very least, endorsed by the command of the First Krajina corps.

Moreover, as we have seen most clearly in the case of the village of Zecovi, a large number of executions and deaths took place in the settlements themselves outside of any combat

engagements. Soldiers would, seemingly randomly, turn up to pillage, murder and rape the surviving inhabitants. The wholesale incarceration of residents by both civilian and military authorities clearly served as a strategy to perpetually displace the Bosniaks and the Croats from Prijedor. This, however, leaves entirely unexplained why were the individual units and soldiers involved in the killings in the first place. In the case of the village of Zecovi, the Serbian soldiers who came from a nearby village, were clearly neither intoxicated nor under any combat stress. The villagers themselves posed no danger. Whatever their individual motive, the political climate in which the Bosniak and Croat civilians were thoroughly criminalized contributed mightily to the crimes perpetrated by the Serb soldiers, as the soldiers had far less or no reason at all to fear the consequences of their misdeeds.

Milomir Stakić, the president of the Prijedor municipality during the war, struck seemingly conciliatory tones upon the takeover of power on 30 April. In a public proclamation he urged:

Dear citizens, peaceful, safe, and protected life and property for each individual are the highest values we have been building up during 50 years in freedom. Therefore, join us and help us to defend all this and preserve it from those who wish to push us into war, death, and desolation. For this reason, let us continue working normally in all companies, institutions, organs, public services, and all the other areas where we work and live.⁹⁵

The establishment of detention facilities overseen by the civilian authorities, and so by Stakić himself; the logistical support for the combat operations in the course of which numerous crimes were committed; finally, Stakić's close contact with the key military and policy leaders all put paid to Stakić's insincere desire for avoidance of violence.⁹⁶ In an interview with BBC in 1993, Stakić revealed his view of the war declaring that the war was "only a struggle against the

⁹⁵ ICTY, Stakić, (IT-97-24), „Document provided by the witness on 2.02.03, obtained on 30.4.92, from a journalist, Mr. Rajlic, who worked in the mine, then moved to Kozarski Vijesnik, read out on Radio Prijedor on 30.4.92, TR 3.02.03, p. 27 l. 7“, Exhibit, D56B.

⁹⁶ That the Serb political leadership from Prijedor wanted to permanently expel the Bosniaks and Croats is further corroborated by the statements by Slobodan Kuruzović, a member of the SDS municipal board, who asserted that “the Serb plan was to reduce the number of Muslims in Prijedor to 10 per cent or less, and later to reduce this to 2 per cent or less.” Quoted according to ICTY, Krajišnik (IT-00-39), *Judgment*, para. 474.

extremists among that people, those who did not want co-existence here, who wanted a unitary state with absolute rights for the Muslim people and with prepared programmes for the extermination of the Serb people from these areas.”⁹⁷ Asked to explain how the violent conflict came about and the role the Bosnian Serbs played in the events, Stakić delivered a short historical lesson:

Those of us who have lived here for centuries, I mean the Serbs and the other peoples, I also mean the Muslims, who were created artificially, who were against the Serbs in the previous two wars, while the Serbs were on the side of the allies both times. And this was from the very beginning, in other words, not at the very end of the war. What should have been done... actually, a little more time should have been devoted to getting to know the spirit and mentality of this people. Both times, in both the world wars... previous wars, we Serbs with our broadmindedness forgave everything, all the crimes that were committed by the Ustashas, mobilised from among the Croatian people and the Muslim people... where we suffered more by their hand than by the hand of fascist Germany, where on Kozara alone, 14,000 children were killed.⁹⁸

Stakić’s deeds during the war showed that his definition of „extremists“ went well beyond the common sense notion of that term, and included primarily Bosniak civilians. The key statement or sentiment expressed by Stakić here is contained in the claim that „we Serbs with our broadmindedness forgave everything“: the genocide of the Serbs from Prijedor perpetrated by the Croats and Bosniaks in the Second World War made any political reorganization of Bosnia that would put the Serbs under the Croat and Bosniak rule morally beyond the pale in the minds of the Bosnian Serbs. However, note also the claim that the Bosniaks „were created artificially“ as well as the reference to the First World War. Both are revealing as I will discuss in the conclusion.

Another illustrative case are the speeches held by Srđan Srdić, the deputy from Prijedor in the Assembly of the Serb People in Bosnia and Herzegovina. During a session held on 22 November 1992, Srdić defiantly reminded the Serb deputies that the Serb authorities in Prijedor

⁹⁷ ICTY, Stakić (IT-97-24), Judgment, para. 497.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

“ [the Bosniaks were] sorted out and packed in hard package where they belong.”⁹⁹ On 8 January of the following year, Srdić explicitly connected the Serb territorial claims with the Second World War massacres in Prijedor assuring the Serb deputies that “We have conquered, actually restored only the Serb territory that they took away from us back in 1941 when they conducted a massacre over the Serb people”.¹⁰⁰ On 2 August 1992, during a celebration of the second anniversary of the SDS in a Prijedor village Marička, Srdić fully endorsed the crimes committed against the Bosniaks and Croats in the preceding months: „Speaking of Serbian forgiveness, Srdić underlined that there will be no forgiveness this time, because historical mistakes must not be repeated. Every bit of Serbian land will be resolutely defended.”¹⁰¹

It is clear that the civilian and military authorities did not prosecute the war criminals, and by the wholesale imprisonment of inhabitants wanted to permanently expel the Bosniaks and the Croats from Prijedor. Instrumental in both the execution as well as in the cover-up of crimes was the chief of the Prijedor public security station, Simo Drljača.¹⁰² For example, after the mass murder of the Bosniak prisoners at the Korićani cliffs, he refused an order of the chief of the Republika Srpska Ministry of Internal Affairs, Mićo Stanišić, to investigate the murders, allegedly because the perpetrators had already joined the Serb Army and were thus out of his reach.¹⁰³

⁹⁹ ICTY, Karadzic and Mladic (IT-95-5/18) „Transcript from the 22nd Session of the Republika Srpska Assembly, dated 23 and 24 November 1992“ Exhibit P01105, p 116.

¹⁰⁰ ICTY, Tolimir (IT-05-88/2) „24th Session of the Assembly of Serb People in Bosnia and Herzegovina, dated 8 January 1993“, Exhibit P01398.E, p. 31-32.

¹⁰¹ ICTY, Brdjanin (IT-99-36): „Article published in Kozarski Vjesnik entitled, "Celebration of the 2nd anniversary of the SDS on Sunday in the village of Marička“, Exhibit P2582a

¹⁰² Drljača was arrested in 1997 by the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia on charges of genocide and other crimes against non-Serb civilians during the Bosnian War. During his arrest, Drljača opened fire and was subsequently shot and killed by NATO-led Stabilization Force troops.

¹⁰³ ICTY, Krajišnik (IT-00-39), Exhibit P763 (Nielsen report), paras 290-1. The crime at the Korićani Cliffs was apparently egregious enough that a neighboring brigade, the 22nd Light Infantry Brigade from the town of Kotor Varoš, wrote a report to its commanding unit, distancing itself from what they themselves termed “genocide” at the

The local political leadership referred to the massacres of the Second World War also in order to paint the war effort and the ultimate political goals as a means to defend the Serb population from a repetition of the Second World War. Here is an excerpt from the daily local newspaper, *Kozarski vjesnik*, written on 31 December 1992, detailing the self-understanding and the accomplishments of the Serb Democratic Party from Prijedor: “The Serbian Democratic Party has played a historic role. It has succeeded in saving Serbdom from biological extinction. The vampire-like ghosts of the past have started to implement the Starčević¹⁰⁴ principle- one third of the Serbs should be killed, one third converted to Catholicism, and the last third expelled. They have started to carry out the decisions of the Episcopal Synod of 1900.”¹⁰⁵ The then chairmen of the Prijedor board of the SDS, Simo Mišković, detailed the rationale behind their policy in an interview given to *Kozarski Vjesnik* in July 1993. According to Mišković: “Yes, it is true SDS succeeded in its task to save the Serbian population from the planned genocide. As head of the crises HQ at that particular time - the time prior to armed action - there was only one thought in my mind - a moral obligation to prevent the recurrence of 1941 and a new ordeal of the Serbian people”¹⁰⁶ Mišković, in an interview given a year later, explained the “justness” of the Serb takeover of Prijedor and the following crackdown on the Bosniaks and Croats in the following terms: “Through history this has always been and will remain Serbian territory. According to the last census of 1991 the Serbs were the majority here, not to mention the fact that 73.2% of the land on the territory of the Prijedor municipality belonged to them. To ignore these facts

Korićani cliffs. ICTY, Krajisnik (IT-00-39) ”Command of 22nd Light Infantry Brigade extraordinary report to 1KK - Intelligence and Security Division. 21 August 1992”, Exhibit P892.84.1

¹⁰⁴ Ante Starčević (1823-1896) was a Croatian politician and writer, widely acknowledged for his contributions to the national revival movement of the nineteenth century in Croatia. While he was seen as a champion of Croatian independence and national identity, he was also known for his strong nationalist views which often included anti-Serbian rhetoric.

¹⁰⁵ ICTY, Sikirica et al. (IT-95-8), “Article in *Kozarski Vjesnik* entitled “SDS - The party of the centre”, dated 31 December 1992”, Exhibit 63-5.27a.

¹⁰⁶ ICTY, Karadzic and Mladic (IT-95-5/18) „*Kozarski Vjesnik* article titled The Political aims are clear depicting an interview of Misković, President of SDS Prijedor“, Exhibit D04208.E

would have been a "political suicide"“ He again repeated the ostensible fear of a repetition of the massacres from the Second World War: “To begin with, we thwarted one of many attempts to throw the Serbs, although they form the majority in these areas, into pits and death camps again.”¹⁰⁷

Discussion

Existing Literature on Ethnic Violence and Prijedor

Jasna Dragović, surveying the literature on the violent dissolution of Yugoslavia, highlights the following five groups of explanations:

1. Theories based on the *longue durée*, such as ancient hostilities, civilization clashes, or the effects of imperial rule.
2. Theories centered on the historical legacy of nineteenth century South Slav national ideologies and the initial Yugoslav state-building attempt from 1918 to 1941.
3. Theories focused on the influence of Yugoslavia's socialist system, its constitutional evolution and federal layout, ideological delegitimization, and economic collapse.
4. Theories examining the period of Yugoslavia's disintegration in the late 1980s, and the role of political and intellectual forces.
5. Theories considering the impact of external factors.¹⁰⁸

Based on the evidence presented in the previous chapter, the political conflict and the violence in Prijedor chime well with the second group of reasons. Dragović writes that at the core of the historical legacy of the South Slav national ideologies stood different national identities adopted by the Serbs and Croats (and later on by the Bosniaks) in the course of nineteenth

¹⁰⁷ ICTY, Karadzic and Mladic (IT-95-5/18), „Kozarski Vjesnik newspaper articles entitled How Dr. Milomir Stakic, first Chairman of the Serbian Municipal Assembly of Prijedor, saw the events of the 30th April“, Exhibit P06581.E

¹⁰⁸ Jasna Dragović-Soso, “Why Did Yugoslavia Disintegrate? An Overview of Contending Explanations.” in *State Collapse in South-Eastern Europe: New Perspectives on Yugoslavia's Disintegration*, eds. Lenard J. Cohen and Jasna Dragović-Sošo (West Lafayette: Purdue University Press, 2008), 1–39, 2.

century. This difference made a viable common South Slav, therefore, highly unlikely. What explains the violence that followed the breakup of Yugoslavia, however, is rooted not simply in different national ideologies, but in their orthogonal nature: the Serbs, Croats and the Bosniaks coveted the same territories.¹⁰⁹ This is visible in the numerous references to the founding of the first Yugoslav state in the proclamations and speeches of the top Bosnian Serb leadership, in addition to their persistent and unyielding threats that made Bosnia's existence contingent upon its continued affiliation with Yugoslavia.

Let us look at the other three possible explanations.¹¹⁰ The first group of explanations focusing on the preexisting grievances spanning centuries, or deep, civilizational differences might partly explain why so many Serbs from Prijedor were eager to embrace violence against the Bosniaks and Croats, or why paranoia so easily spread once the fighting broke out. Prejudices against the Bosniaks held by the Serbs were widespread and deeply held, as the derogatory name for the Bosniaks “Turks” implied.¹¹¹ Similarly, the Serbs harbored deep suspicions about the Catholic Croats, whom they connected with the proselytizing efforts of the Catholic Church in the Habsburg lands in the previous centuries.¹¹² There are two issues with this line of reasoning. First, if these suspicions and prejudices were as fundamental to the way the Bosnian Serbs understood their relationship towards the Bosniaks and Croats, it is hard to see how they could – and they did, repeatedly - envisage any kind of a common South Slav state. Secondly, and

¹⁰⁹ Dragović-Soso, “Why Did Yugoslavia Disintegrate?”, 7.

¹¹⁰ I leave aside the last group of explanations as I could find no empirical support for the impact of external factors on the happenings in Prijedor, although, of course, the impact of external factors on the breakup of Yugoslavia, and the War in Bosnia in particular, has been a hotly contested topic in the secondary literature. See Dragović-Soso, “Why Did Yugoslavia Disintegrate?”, 23-27.

¹¹¹ Yerlan Iskakov, “Stereotypes and Prejudice in Conflict: The Case of Bosnia and Herzegovina.” *Journal for the Study of Peace and Conflict* (2010-2012): 122-29, 126.

¹¹² Bojan Aleksov, “The Serbian Orthodox Church.” in *Orthodox Christianity and nationalism in nineteenth-century southeastern Europe*, ed. Lucian N. Leustean (Fordham University Press, 2014).

more pertinently, the central theme of the Prijedor political leadership's rhetoric revolved around the alleged “ownership” rights of the Serbs over the territory of Prijedor, along with references to the massacres during the Second World War (indeed, the two are connected as I argue throughout the thesis.)

What about theories concentrated on the impact of Yugoslavia's socialist system? Some authors trace Yugoslavia's demise to “constitutional nationalism” that was fostered by the Communist.¹¹³ On this reading of the Communist rule, the constitutional decentralization along the borders of the republics encouraged the Yugoslavs to conceive of their identity in narrow national terms. At the same time, the decentralization sharpened the fears of minorities in the republics. As I have mentioned in the chapter on the Communist rule, the Serbs did feel aggravated by the constitutional devolution pursued by the Communists in the sixties and seventies. In Bosnia, however, no such territorialization of non-Serb national sentiments happened, and while Serbs, Croats and Bosniaks were given the status of “constitutional” nations in Bosnia, they were clearly encouraged by the institutional design to think of the Bosnian land as being “co-owned” by, rather than partitioned between, the three groups. It is pertinent to ask what would have happened if the Yugoslav constitutional design had decentralized Bosnia like it did Serbia after the Second World War. In that case Prijedor would have been part of a Serb dominated, territorially delineated entity within Bosnia, but the violent breakup would likely have happened anyway, as the entity would still have been a part of Bosnia that the Bosniaks and Croats would have “voted out” of Yugoslavia. To bring this line of reasoning to its natural conclusion, we can ask what would have happened if the Communists had attached Bosnia to Serbia after the Second World War. As that attachment

¹¹³ Robert M. Hayden, *Blueprints for a house divided: the constitutional logic of the Yugoslav conflicts*. (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2000), 6.

would have been conditional on the continuing existence of Yugoslavia, one can imagine that the Croats and Bosniaks would have offered armed resistance to any extension of the Serb rule over Bosnia in the case of Yugoslavia's collapse. In this scenario, they would likely once again faced violent suppression from the Serb military. The preceding counterfactual reasoning let us, therefore, see that the "constitutional nationalism" was itself expressive of conflicting national ideologies.¹¹⁴ Something similar can be said about the theories that try to explain the demise of Yugoslavia via economic channels such as the massive disparity in incomes between the Yugoslav republics and the debt crises that shook the country in the eighties – that the economic instability led to the sharpening of the national tensions seems more a downstream result of the embattled national ideologies than its cause.¹¹⁵ We can see this most clearly in the fact that the harangues of the Prijedor SDS branch contain little or no traces of economic resentment towards the Bosniaks or Croats.

The authors who emphasis the role of Slobodan Milošević and the events happening immediately prior to the outbreak of the Yugoslav wars¹¹⁶ in the eighties could seemingly better explain the willingness of the Prijedor Serbs to impose violence on their neighbors. For one, the Prijedor Serbs' takeover of the municipality was entirely predicated on the military support of the Serb dominated Yugoslav People's Army (JNA).¹¹⁷ Moreover, the consensus view in the

¹¹⁴ This is not to say that the constitutional decentralization of Yugoslavia was not a factor in the conflicts over Kosovo and the concomitant rise of Slobodan Milošević, see Robert M. Hayden, *From Yugoslavia to the Western Balkans Studies of a European Disunion, 1991-2011* (Brill, 2013), 29-31.

¹¹⁵ For a contrary view see Nebojša Vladislavljević, *Serbia's Antibureaucratic Revolution: Milošević, the Fall of Communism and Nationalist Mobilization*. (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008).

¹¹⁶ For example, Louis Sell, *Slobodan Milošević and the Destruction of Yugoslavia*. (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002) and James Gow, *The Serbian project and its adversaries: a strategy of war crimes*. (Montreal: McGill-Queen's Press-MQUP, 2003).

¹¹⁷ On the deep involvement of JNA (and thus, partly, Milošević) in the military and political preparations of the Bosnian Serbs prior to the start of the War see Mesud Šadinlija, *Između pravde i realpolitike: odnos mirovnih planova i vojnih operacija u Bosni i Hercegovini 1992-1995*. [Between Justice and Realpolitik: the Relationship

secondary literature on the breakup of Yugoslavia is that Milošević stoked the flames of the Serbian nationalism¹¹⁸, something that obviously could have „primed“ the Prijedor Serbs to embrace violence in their conflict with the Bosniaks and Croats. Here, however, it is important to emphasize the extent to which the local Prijedor leadership thought of itself as having spurred the top Bosnian Serb leadership into action in Prijedor rather than vice versa. As Srđa Srdić, the deputy from Prijedor in the Serb Assembly in Bosnia proudly reminded other deputies in 1992: “We didn't ask you or anyone, not even Mr. Karadžić or Mr. Krajišnik what we had to do in Prijedor. The only green municipality [i.e. where the Bosniaks were in majority] in the Bosnian Krajina was Prijedor. Had we listened to you, we would still be green, we would still be Krupa [the neighboring municipality the Serbs unsuccessfully trade to take in 1992], and Prijedor would not be Prijedor.”¹¹⁹ Milošević and more broadly the nationalistic impulses coming from Serbia, therefore, could be said to have enabled rather than inspired the Prijedor Serbs leadership to engage in crimes. Of course, one could also point towards the actions of the Bosniaks and the Croats in the run-up to the War that the Serbs deemed provocative or abrasive, such as the staging of the referendum on the Bosnian independence on the eve of the War in 1992.¹²⁰ But even if one grants the causal force of the events that happened immediately prior to the War, that force is only explicable in the light of the conflicting national ideologies of the three ethnic groups. In other words, the Serbs, for example, felt assaulted by the referendum on the independency of Bosnia, because their

between Peace Plans and Military Operations in Bosnia and Herzegovina 1992-1995] (Sarajevo: Institut za istraživanje zločina protiv čovječnosti i međunarodnog prava Univerziteta u Sarajevu, 2018), 56-57.

¹¹⁸ For non-consensus views see Dragović, “Why Did Yugoslavia Disintegrate?”, 22, n. 117.

¹¹⁹ ICTY, Karadzic and Mladic (IT-95-5/18) „Transcript from the 22nd Session of the Republika Srpska Assembly, dated 23 and 24 November 1992“ Exhibit P01105, p 116.

¹²⁰ The legality of the referendum was at the very least moot, see Hayden, *Blueprints for a House Divided*, 95, and Kosta Nikolić *Jugoslavija, poslednji dani (1989-1992). Knjiga 1*. [Yugoslavia, the Last Days (1989-1992). Book 1] (Beograd: Službeni glasnik, 2018), 223. For a contrary view see Admir Mulaosmanović, "Na putu ka nezavisnosti. Referendum u Bosni i Hercegovini." [Towards the Independence. The Referendum in Bosnia and Herzegovina] *Historijska traganja* 10 (2012): 203-231.

conception of Bosnia, precluded the loss or diminishment of sovereignty over territories the Bosnian Serbs deemed theirs.

The role of historical memory

In the preceding discussion of the potential reasons for the breakup of Yugoslavia the mass killings committed during the Second World War are absent. In discussing this absence, Dragović writes that while most students of the Yugoslav wars note the significance of the historical memory for the violent breakup, the exact influence of that memory (or, equally, those events) on the national mobilization and the concomitant war crimes is underresearched. Dragović suggests that the role of the historical memory is best studied as being situated at the intersection between private and public memories, thus moving the focus away from national to the individual level.¹²¹

In the literature review chapter, I noted that among the standard works on the breakup of Yugoslavia that discussed the bearing of the Second World War on the violence in the nineties, the consensus view is that to the extent that influence was present, it showed itself in the purported fear of the Serbs from a repetition of mass killings. Let us now briefly consider scholars who discussed this issue comprehensively in their published works.

Wolfgang Höpken in “War, Memory, and Education in a Fragmented Society: The Case of Yugoslavia,” in discussing the memorialization of the Second World War pursued by the

¹²¹ Dragović-Soso, “Why Did Yugoslavia Disintegrate?”, 22.

Communists, notes and criticizes the attempts to “de-ethnicize” the war in Yugoslavia. According to Höpken, such policy wanted to preclude historical memory from stoking ethnic conflict, but it resulted in “fragmented memory”, where segments of society harbored memories of the war in conflict with the official education policy.¹²² Moreover, the policy left a gap that was filled by the nationalists who used it to stoke ethnic tensions between the Serbs and the Croats in the eighties. From the point of view of my thesis, there are two issues with Höpken’s argument. First, he does not explain why the Serb masses were receptive to the nationalist discourse. Second, and relatedly, he fails to see the connection made by the Serbs between the Second World War mass killings and their territorial claims in Bosnia and Croatia. As we have seen in the case of Prijedor, the local Bosnian Serb leadership both enjoyed a plebiscitary support, and pursued a radical nationalist policies with élan.

Bette Denich in “Dismembering Yugoslavia: Nationalist Ideologies and the Symbolic Revival of Genocide” quotes one of the leaders of the Croatian Serbs saying in 1989 that “... where we are confronted with real dangers and existential fears, it is normal to unite in the framework of the national idea and to use that principal to defend ourselves. If I am attacked as Jovan and as a Serb, it is only as a Serb that I can defend myself“ and interprets the remark to mean that the Serbs started emphasizing their ethnic identity “in response to the sense of threat and potential victimization“.¹²³ Denich fails to unpack the ambiguity around the terms “real dangers” and “attacked as Jovan” – the Serbs in Bosnia and Croatia certainly felt threatened in the run-up to the Yugoslav wars, but part of that feeling was induced by the fact that their own ethnic identity

¹²² Wolfgang Höpken, “War, Memory, and Education in a Fragmented Society: The Case of Yugoslavia.” *East European Politics and Societies*, Vol. 13, No. 1(Winter 1999): 201-202.

¹²³ Bette Denich, "Dismembering Yugoslavia: nationalist ideologies and the symbolic revival of genocide." *American ethnologist* 21, no. 2 (1994): 367-390, 376-377.

was modified by the experiences of the Second World War to include more exclusive territorial claims.

Robert M. Hayden's account of how the atrocities of the Second World War impacted the Yugoslav politics in the eighties is focused less on the purported fears of the Serbs on the eve of Yugoslavia's collapse, and more on the politics of remembering the atrocities. According to Hayden, the key reason why the Serbs and Croats developed their victimhood narratives was a need to "cancel" politically each other's demands. As he writes "The Croatian discovery of massacres by communists and the Serbian concentration on the crimes of the Ustasha in the last "Independent State of Croatia" are meant to discredit the moral authority of the communists in the first case and Croatian nationalists in the second, and to disqualify them from politics".¹²⁴ I agree, although I would add that by "disqualify them from politics" was meant to mean at the time not the wholesale negation of each other's ethnic identity, but rather the negation of each other's territorial claims. This is clearly visible in the Prijedor Serbs' invocation of the Second World War massacres: the memory of the mass killings of the Serbs was primarily used as a bludgeon to smash the political goals of the Bosniaks for Bosnia's independency.¹²⁵

Zeynep Bulutgil, in a methodologically rigorous study, finds that the Serb Second World War civilian deaths were no good predictor of the Serb propensity to vote for the SDS in the 1990 elections. If she is right, here results challenge my basic thesis by rendering the connection between the two wars moot. In her study, she regresses the SDS municipal votes on the

¹²⁴ Hayden, "Recounting the Dead", 42.

¹²⁵ In the more recent works on the effect of the Ustasha atrocities on the breakup of Yugoslavia the fear factor rather than anger is, again, stressed. For example, Shyamal Kataria, "Serbian Ustashe Memory and Its Role in the Yugoslav Wars, 1991–1995." *Mediterranean Quarterly* 26, no. 2 (2015): 115-127, and Helena Ivanov, "Inside propaganda: Serbian media in the Yugoslav Wars 1991-1995." (PhD diss., London School of Economics and Political Science, 2021), 159-170.

percentage of Serbs killed in Jasenovac in terms of their overall share of the Serb population in the respective municipalities and finds no statistically significant relationship between the two.¹²⁶ The later variable serves as a proxy for the Serb civilian deaths. However, here results are flawed as the geographical distribution of the Jasenovac victims is geographically skewed: a number of Serb majority municipalities experienced massive violence outside of the Jasenovac concentration camps. For example, of all Serb civilian deaths in Hercegovina, only 6,5% died in Jasenovac.¹²⁷ As the SDS won overwhelmingly the Serb vote in Hercegovina, the regression would, if anything, show the opposite sign: the less Serb died in Jasenovac, the more vote the SDS got in 1990.

In trying to unearth the imprint the Ustasha atrocities left on the Prijedor Serbs, one has to look no further than the local Serb leadership. Milan Kovačević, for example, was born in an Ustasha concentration camp, while Srđa Srđić, having been born in 1927, witnessed the atrocities throughout his teenage years. And yet, as we have seen, neither the two of them nor any other key Serb leader focused on or spoke much of „revenge“. It is, therefore, apt to ask in what sense can the Serb atrocities be described as “revenge”? The word “revenge” invokes in everyday life an image of intimacy and immediacy that hardly seems credible even in the case of Kovačević and Srđić, let alone all the other Serb perpetrators born in the sixties and seventies. Moreover, if the Prijedor Serbs wanted to “avenge themselves”, such desire was hardly compatible with their initial political goal of keeping Bosnia, and thus themselves,

¹²⁶ H. Zeynep Bulutgil, *The roots of ethnic cleansing in Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 133-135.

¹²⁷ Cvetković, Dragan. "Geostatistička analiza", 109.

joined to Serbia. The harsh measures and toxic rhetoric was adopted only in the second half of 1991, and especially once the war started.¹²⁸

The violence committed by the Ustasha was perceived by the Prijedor Serbs as being communal in nature. By that I mean that the distinction between the small and highly ideologized core of the Ustasha movement, that was both the instigator of violence and its primary organizer, and the Croat and Bosniak masses, lost much of its political significance once the Ustasha regime had to rely on them to prop its flailing state. Intuitively, therefore, one would expect that the Serbs' failure to distinguish between the two did not owe its existence to propaganda efforts of the Serb political and intellectual elites. If anything, the opposite is true. As a further piece of evidence, the Prijedor Serb virtually unanimously supported its political leadership, and unlike, for example in the Belgrade region, enthusiastically embraced the military call-up already in 1991, when the Prijedor municipality sent two of its infantry brigades to fight in Croatia. This is not to say that the vote for SDS in 1990 or answering the military call-ups imply that the Serb masses envisaged and then executed a policy of war crimes. But at the very least one can say that their support for the political leadership that did just that, was home-grown.

Even though the evidence I presented showcases the moral outrage that was driving the Prijedor Serbs, that evidence also contains ample references to the supposed fear of the Croats and Bosniaks. How does that fit into my thesis? First, the fear was clearly operative once the fighting broke out, but that is question begging. Second, let us note that as a general rhetorical

¹²⁸ Donia, *Radovan Karadžić*, 99. Donia's account deals with Radovan Karadžić, but many of his findings apply, I believe, to the Bosnian Serb political leadership as a whole. Donia does not, however, connect Karadžić's anger with the Second World War.

rule whatever policy one pursues is made more credible if it is invoked in self-defense: one can doubt someone's right to patrimony, but not someone's right to life.

But while the Prijedor Serbs's contestation of Bosnia's independency is explicable by rage rather than by fear, that fact on its own does not explain the numerous crimes committed by the Serb forces. How should we account for it? What role did the memory of the Second World War have in the second episode of violence in Prijedor? First, let us note that the initial takeover of the Prijedor Municipality was bloodless, and while the Bosniaks were maltreated from the start of the Serb rule, the mass killings and detention camps materialized only after their rule met armed resistance, first at Hambarine and then in the failed Bosniak assault on Prijedor on May 30. That the civilian deaths were contingent on armed conflict, rather than on the Serb power grab, is most clearly evidenced by the fate of the Bosniaks in Banja Luka. The biggest city in the western Bosnia saw, relatively speaking, only a few Bosniak deaths,¹²⁹ as the Banja Luka Bosniaks did not challenge the Serb rule. However, the same example of Banja Luka shows that the presence of armed conflict was not a necessary condition for the expulsion of the Bosniaks, as all were expelled from Banja Luka during the war. Thus, Radoslav Brđanin, an eminent Bosnian Serb political leader based in Banja Luka, remarked in July 1992: „What we have seen in Prijedor is an example of a job well done and it is a pity that many in Banja Luka are not aware of it yet, just as they are not aware of what might happen in Banja Luka in the very near future.”¹³⁰ Tentatively one may, therefore, say that the memory of the Second

¹²⁹ Armina Galijaš, *Eine bosnische Stadt im Zeichen des Krieges. Ethnopolitik und Alltag in Banja Luka (1990-1995)*. [A Bosnian City Marked by War. Ethnopolitics and Everyday Life in Banja Luka (1990-1995).] (München: Oldenbourg Wissenschaftsverlag, 2019), 219. According to the data from the Research Documentation Center in Sarajevo, ninety Bosniak civilians died in Banja Luka during the war. Tokača, *Bosanska knjiga mrtvih, Tom I-VI*. I calculated the aggregate number based on the data from the publication.

¹³⁰ ICTY, Krajisnik (IT-00-39) „Kozarski Vjesnik – War Edition Date: 17 July 1992 Headline: Krajina Representatives in Prijedor“, Exhibit P361.1. Tomislav Dulić in an innovative study of the spatial distribution of

World War helped prepare the Prijedor Serbs willingness to expel the Bosniaks and Croats, but that the mass killings were more contingent on battleship intensity and in particular on combat outcomes.

I say “helped prepare” as my thesis claims that the victimization of the Prijedor Serbs in the Second World War boosted their sense of ownership of Prijedor: it did not create it. In order to further localize the effects of the previous episode of violence on the events in Prijedor, we have to ask a counterfactual: would the violence in Prijedor have happened even without the Second World War massacres? First let us note that the proclamations and speeches of both the top Bosnian Serb leadership as well as the Prijedor Serb leadership contain numerous references to the political rights of the Serbs in Bosnia that supposedly preceded the creation of both Yugoslav states. Moreover, the Serbs harbored deep suspicions of the Bosniaks and Croats based on their experience of the Ottoman and Habsburg rules, the suspicions which in opportune times helped strengthen the general moral obtuseness that always underpins episodes of mass communal violence. Let us also note that the Prijedor Serbs’ sense of territorial entitlement was further bolstered by the creation of the Vrbas Banovina in the Royal Yugoslavia¹³¹, the creation of which strengthened the Serb self-rule at the expense of Sarajevo.

lethal violence against civilians in the Bosnian War tests the hypothesis that „highly securitized municipalities in which the attacking side does not enjoy a demographic majority will become disproportionately affected by the killing of civilians.“ The securitized areas are those municipalities deemed of strategic value by the combatants. He finds a statistically significant relationship between the Bosniak and Croat civilian deaths and the municipalities deemed strategic by the Serbs in which the Serbs were not majority. Prijedor fits the relationship well, but Banja Luka does not. I surmise that controlling for the presence of contestation of territory (only partly proxied by battleship intensity) and in particular for combat outcome would explain better civilian deaths and the potentially differing intentions of the three ethnic groups. Tomislav Dulić, “The Patterns of Violence in Bosnia and Herzegovina: Security, Geography and the Killing of Civilians during the War of the 1990s.” *Political Geography* 63, (April 2017): 1–11.

¹³¹ The Vrbas Banovina was a province of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia between 1929 and 1941. In 1929, King Alexander I introduced a new administrative division. The Vrbas Banovina, named after the Vrbas River, was one of the nine banovinas created during this process. It included parts of today's western and northern Bosnia. Banja Luka was the capital of Vrbas Banovina, which also included cities like Prijedor, Jajce, Mrkonjić Grad, Srbac,

Finally, let us briefly consider the case of the Bosnian Croats in the Bosnian War. The Bosnian Croats present an apposite “control group” for the Bosnian Serbs, as they shared many socio-economic and cultural traits with the Bosnian Serb, while having had the contrasting experience with the Bosniaks during the Second World War as no mass violence was inflicted by the Bosniaks on the Croats. However, the Bosnian Croats subjected the Bosniaks to a structurally similar level of violence as did the Bosnian Serbs in the Bosnian War, albeit on a smaller scale.¹³² Taken together, therefore, one can say that the Bosnian Serbs would likely have first contested Bosnia’s independency and then unleashed mass violence on the Bosniaks and Croats even without the bitter memories of the Second World War atrocities.

Concluding Remarks

The key finding of my thesis is that the atrocities of the Ustasha regime on the Prijedor Serbs boosted the Prijedor Serbs’ sense that Prijedor is “Serbian”. As the Communist rule left unanswered the question of who the ultimate owner of Prijedor is, the Prijedor Serbs greeted with rage the Bosniaks and Croat attempt to “dispossess” them by majority voting in 1992.

Thus, neither fear of a new Ustasha regime nor the purported desire of the Bosnian Serbs to “avenge themselves” explain the crimes committed by the Prijedor Serb armed forces in 1992.

Let us now look at possible limitations of my thesis. The reader will have noticed that I do not try to judge the validity of the “moral case” of the Prijedor Serbs and have been merely content to point out its immoral consequences in the Bosnian War. I have as it were “naturalized”

Kotor Varoš, and others. For a detailed account of the new administrative division see Predrag Ž. Vajagić, "Banovinas –Administrative Unites of King Alexander I Karađorđević and his Personal Regime." *Истраживања* 31 (2020): 232-253.

¹³² Consider, for example, ICTY, Prlić et al. (IT-04-74), *Judgment*.

violence. For after all, weren't the Serbs not only the victims but also the perpetrators in the Second World War in Bosnia? And if so, should we not say that the anger the Prijedor Serbs experienced in the nineties was due to a nationalistic, Greater Serbian ideology rather than to a trauma? Moreover, although the Ustasha violence was in the event communal in nature, the initial thrust was delivered by a small highly ideologized group that can hardly be said to have been representative of the Croat body politic at the time. In my defense, the academic literature is split on whether the Bosnian Serbs were primarily the victims or equally the victims and the perpetrators in the Second World War.¹³³ More importantly, the "moral case" of the Prijedor Serb itself is not empirically moot, as the evidence I presented shows. However, the question is valid in case of some other Bosnian municipalities, such as Kulen Vakuf or the eastern Bosnian municipalities, where the numbers show that the Serbs were both the victims and the perpetrators.¹³⁴

Another limitation of my thesis is that I do not rigorously show how much the Ustasha violence amplified the readiness of the Prijedor Serbs to inflict violence on the Bosniaks and the Croats in the nineties. One way to study the impact of the Second World War more rigorously would be to look at the Serbs of Bosnian and Croatian extraction who volunteered to fight in Croatia and Bosnia. Was there a statistically significant difference in war enthusiasm between the Serbs of Bosnian and Croatian origin and the other Serbs from Serbia?

¹³³ Höpken, for example, finds some support for the former view, whereas Donia does not. Höpken, "War, Memory, and Education", 211 and Donia, *Radovan Karadžić*, 186. I note in passing that both authors fail to use what seems to me to be the relevant metric to settle the case: the number of Serbs, Bosniaks and Croats civilians killed by the nationalists from each group over a territory each nationalist group coveted. Of course, even this metric is ambiguous, as many civilians were killed by the Germans or the Yugoslav Partisans.

¹³⁴ On Kulen Vakuf, see Bergholz, *Violence as a Generative Force*, 1-3, and on the eastern Bosnian municipalities see the civilian deaths in Cvetković "Geostatička analiza", 109-114.

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