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# SREBRENICA

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Autor: Prof. dr. Suada A. Džogović

Thirty years after the genocide in Srebrenica, we are faced not only with the increase and acceptance of war crimes in post-war Europe, but also with an epistemological breakdown of the very idea of humanity. The hypocrisy of the international community, which made declarations but disarmed victims when protection was most needed, dominates today's regime of memory. The 1995 murder of more than eight thousand three hundred and seventy-two Bosniak men and boys in a UN Safe Zone is not only bloody evidence of the defeat of humanity, but also a moral indictment of the West-established institutions that claimed to protect but failed to do so even when they had a clear mandate to.

Srebrenica is not just the geographical point of a tragic memory, nor is it exclusively a subject of international justice—it is a theoretical challenge, a turning point for any serious reflection on the limits of existing global law and order. How can we still talk about humanism today when mass slaughter was committed openly in front of the eyes of international institutions? How can we justify the mention of the international laws that silently watched the murder of thousands? And how far is the concept of security extended when it is transformed into an empty semiotic signifier for non-Westerners, as was the case with the UN's "safe zones"? The question is no longer what happened, but how it was possible for this to occur despite the stated goal for international peace of the global "community of nations"?

In the silence of international passivity and institutional withdrawal, the man in Srebrenica was reduced to a biological existence without a voice, without rights, and protection – to a pure, stripped-down existence devoid of any political or legal meaning.

This status of a man reduced to mere life was not just the consequence of a crime, but a symptom of a deep crack in the very foundations of modern notions of law, ethics, and political coexistence. Srebrenica thus reveals itself as a paradigmatic space of the suspension of law, a place where legal subjectivity ceases to be valid, where the community of law falls silent before the Other, leaving behind a moral and ontological void. In this context, a complete understanding of the Srebrenica Genocide does not begin with the question of who fired the shots, but rather who watched and remained silent. The injustice in this case did not begin in July 1995, but much earlier, at the moment when man began to perceive himself as the Other, and then, as that Other, became the target of a bureaucratic algorithm of elimination.

The concept of "bare life", as Agamben explains it, well captures the position of the victims – people who suffered not outside the law, but within its suspension. The ethical relationship to the Other, as Levinas sees it, was suspended entirely – the face of the Other no longer demanded a response, not because it ceased to exist, but because it ceased to be recognized as a face. Evil in Srebrenica did not come as an eruptive hatred, but as an impersonal administration of death: archived, rationalized, and statistically pure. In that case, the global power, in the Foucauldian sense of biopolitics, was not spectacular, but systemic, deciding whose lives are worthy of mourning and whose are declassified from sorrow in advance. Judith Butler would also ask whether these lives were worthy of mourning or had already been declassified in advance.

The same realization resonates in all those theoretical voices: a crime of such proportions is not just a moral horror but the product of structural arrangements in which violence does not come as a deviation, but as a calculated, rationalized possibility. Within such a framework, the Srebrenica Genocide appears not as one specific tragedy, but as a symptom of the structural pathology of the modern world. When more than eight thousand three hundred and seventy-two people were murdered with the assistance of the global forces on site in the UN-declared "safe zone", the legal fiction of security becomes so exclusive and grotesque that it excludes those considered non-Western. What was called the "international order" has proven to be an act of arrogance and power, and the manifestation of a system capable of issuing declarations, but powerless (or unwilling) to protect the lives of the Other.

The Srebrenica Genocide, therefore, symbolizes not only the destruction of the population of a city but also the destruction of the concept of universal human dignity. It also prompts us to question the fundamental post-war consensus established after 1945 – the consensus that a human being is the bearer of inalienable rights. The case of the Srebrenica Genocide, however, clearly demonstrates that this concept is not universally

applied in practice, but only hierarchically. The moment when lives become numbers, and the political price of saving the lives of the powerless is too high, conventions and declarations become irrelevant. Here we come to Arendt's premonition about evil without a face – evil that does not come with a cry, but in the form of bureaucratic consistency, in the language of reports, protocols, and diplomatic delays, which further deepens her point about who has the right to rights. The expanding spaces of moral devastation and the absence of even formal solidarity reveal the limits of the epistemological ideals of contemporary humanism, which are defined not only by ethics and justice but also by interests, geography, and belonging. Human rights, declared to be universal, are found to be distributed according to the logic of power. Some of these rights can be called "ours", while others remain beyond the horizon of grief and recognition. The tragedy of Srebrenica thus becomes a site where the truth of the postcolonial and modern international order is revealed, revealing that so-called universal human rights are in reality a system of differentiation, classification, and control.

And while we strive to maintain the theoretical apparatus at an academic level, the very fact that such analyses are being written decades after the crime, while its denial continues to be institutionalized in various cases and by multiple actors, from states to Nobel Prize laureates, raises a burning question: what has actually been learned from the Srebrenica Genocide? If anything, it is that justice lost through the systematic denial of genocide becomes an empty category: a political act without sovereignty, or words without sanction. And justice without the will to implement it is only a simulation of legal discourse.

The case of the Srebrenica Genocide is not only an example of a moral breakdown but also an ontological dilemma. If humanity is so selectively recognized, is the very concept of its universality merely an exercise of hegemonic ideology? The genocide in Srebrenica was not only the result of the hatred of the executors, but also the result of tolerance, silence, and institutionalized disrespect disguised in the language of neutrality among the powerful. And a philosophy that cannot be understood cannot be called a thought about humanity.

Thirty years after the genocide, widespread and systematic denial of this crime continues at both political and institutional levels. The denial is not simply a denial of historical facts, but also a sophisticated form of post-genocidal violence – a violence that does not operate explosively, but erosively. The denial nowadays is a strategy of erasing and reshaping the truth, an act of symbolically erasing the victims from the collective memory and denying the Bosnian society its much-needed moral catharsis. In this administratively regulated mechanism of silence and relativization practiced in many

places, the truth about the genocide is not destroyed suddenly – it is undermined gradually, through rhetoric, laws, educational systems, and discursive practices that privilege stability over truth, and forgetfulness over justice. And as long as any genocide is denied, its consequences remain present, not only in the bones that have yet to be discovered, but also in the very structures of language, legal norms, and political strategies that produce silence and normalize moral failures that accompany genocide.

Today, thirty years after the execution of the genocide, Serbia and other states and actors still refuse to acknowledge that the crime of genocide was committed in Srebrenica, despite the verdicts of international courts that have unequivocally established the crime of genocide. In Republika Srpska, July 11 is marked as a day of institutionalized denial – a day of resistance to the truth of what was done in the name of their entity. Even international resolutions, such as that of the United Nations

The General Assembly, declaring July 11 as the International Day of Reflection and Commemoration of the 1995 Genocide in Srebrenica, has been met with open political resistance and revisionist propaganda. In this context, the fight for truth is no longer a historical endeavor – it is an existential one.

At the recent "Nevesinje Rifle" event, held to mark the 150th anniversary of the Herzegovina Uprising – an event interpreted in Serbian narratives as the beginning of the struggle for "liberation from the Turks" – the President of Republika Srpska, Milorad Dodik, openly reiterated his "historical goal" – the annexation of Republika Srpska to Serbia, similar to convicted war criminal general Ratko Mladic, who announced the Srebrenica Genocide in July of 1995 as "a revenge against Turks". Therefore, Dodik's speech, given with the expressive support of senior Serbian officials and the presence of leaders from Montenegro, is not just a historical reminder but a continuation of the ideological matrix that preceded the genocide. By celebrating events such as the "Nevesinje Rifle" in July, Bosniaks are once again designated as the heirs of the Ottoman "enemy", thus justifying the genocide committed against them in 1995. Accompanied calls for "Serbian unity" and secession, along with the open demonization of other people, are not just symbolic gestures – they actually form the structure of a political project that reproduces national purity and delegitimization of coexistence, which has been the norm in SE Europe over millennia.

The remembrance of the genocide in Srebrenica cannot be separated from present realities – because the same type of discourse, the same slogans about "national interests", and the same myths about the vulnerability of Serbs because of the mere existence of Bosniaks as Muslims dominate the political sphere again today, not only on the margins,

but in the official rhetorics, under the protection of state symbols and international silence.

Such a collapse of decency is not without its omens. The dehumanization of Bosniaks through public discourse – referred to as "Turks", the epitome of the enemy in Europe – created a social matrix within which mass-murder becomes politically rationalized, culturally digestible, and institutionally feasible. Bosniaks are an ancient Slavic-speaking nation that adopted the monotheism of Islam, roughly at the same time as Christian Orthodoxy consolidated among the Serbs. Therefore, there is no historical dominance of one group over the other that Serbian leaders try to evoke. Instead, the fake historical narrative of "revenge against Turks" served as the legitimizing framework for what was initially called "ethnic cleansing", which turned out to be genocide, according to the judgments of the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia, comprised of judges and supporting staff from more than fifty countries around the world, including Serbia. However, despite these judgments, the international community continues to hesitate in recognizing the crime, and when it does, it often disputes its implications.

The European Union, paradoxically, has positioned itself as a mediator between the official condemnation of denial and the political civility that tolerates its existence – all "for the sake of peace". However, this balancing act does not convey neutrality, but rather a latent complicity. When the truth about the crime is relativized to preserve the political order, the international system no longer acts as an obstacle to injustice, but rather as its subtle accelerator. In this context, the United Nations becomes a symbol not so much of impotence as of calculated paralysis, where security turns into an empty sign and universal rights lose their universality.

The UN General Assembly resolution of June 2024, declaring July 11 as the International Day of Reflection and Commemoration of the 1995 Genocide in Srebrenica, comes years late and still without serious political consequences for those who are trying to deny it. While the families of the victims are still searching for the bones of their loved ones, international actors are debating whether an explicit recognition of the genocide will undermine the "stability of the Balkans", as if truth were a political luxury and the desire for justice were a disruptive factor. Such an approach supports a false rationale in which silence is preferable to truth and denial is more acceptable than responsibility.

Denial of genocide is not to be tolerated, whether as a "personal opinion" or an unpleasant argument of "plurality of thought." Denial of genocide is a form of institutionalized violence against memory, against the living and the dead, and the truth. Any attempt to relativize, reinterpret, or erase the genocide from the collective consciousness represents a continuation of the same aggressive act, but with more sophisticated means: legal,

discursive, and political. In this sense, denialism does not belong to the sphere of freedom of speech, but to the criminal infrastructure of instrumentalization of hegemonic memory.

In a grotesque inversion of justice, invoking human rights in this context appears not only as irony, but also as a moral farce – for what kind of rights are they if they depend on geopolitical convenience and are applied selectively? The Srebrenica Genocide exposed the truth about the international order: universal principles do not measure international peace and justice, but rather only the degree of strategic benefit. Humanism, often invoked in the rhetorical formulas of global elites, in practice gives way to silence, calculation, and a willingness to suppress the truth to preserve the illusion of stability. In the case of the Srebrenica Genocide, therefore, the concept of common morality is collapsing.

Consequently, the reconciliation expressly advocated without the support of truth is nothing more than a sophisticated form of revisionism.

After all that, a deeper layer of the problem opens here: what, in fact, did the international community learn from the Srebrenica Genocide?

If judgments do not produce a transformation of memory, if institutional acknowledgments do not move power structures that have remained silent, is declarative justice just a retrospective choreography devoid of moral and political strength? If, as Hannah Arendt claimed, man is a political being who realizes his humanity through belonging to a community, then the one who is murdered for belonging to a community in the silence of the international community is proof that the currently dominant civilization itself has reached its limits, where it suspends its stated principles. In this sense, Srebrenica is not an event of the past – it is a mirror that continues to reflect the moral capitulation of international politics and the cynicism of world elites.

If there is anything more radical than the act of genocide itself, it is the systematic denial. And if there is anything that deeply undermines the ethical foundations of the international order, it is the instrumentalization of collective memory in the name of so-called geopolitical stability. The truth about Srebrenica should not be a topic that cannot be discussed. It requires relentless pursuit and principled consistency. In this sense, the establishment of an International Day of Remembrance, although a necessary measure, remains symbolically empty if it simultaneously tolerates institutionalized denial, excuses for the perpetrators, and the normalization of revisionist narratives.

Memory loses its ethical weight when truth is contested in legislative bodies by explanations of "political pragmatism", while mass graves still speak for the state. Such

epistemological dissonance is not only unacceptable but also signals a moral breakdown, further destabilizing the remnants of the international normative structure.

Srebrenica remains a global litmus test for the very idea of dominant civilization. Its painful epitaph does not end in Podrinje, where Srebrenica is situated, but today pulsates through the borders of Gaza, the crossroads of East and Central Asia in the homeland of Uyghurs, the valleys of Sudan, and the forests of Myanmar with the Rohingya people. This is not about history repeating itself, but about the metamorphosis of wars into contemporary forms of violence and oblivion, which Clausewitz noted to have no purpose as wars, and are rather expressions of racism and sickness unbecoming the human race. The pattern, which we are witnessing, did not disappear with the Srebrenica Genocide. It has only been perfected since then. And if we still do not recognize this logic and the importance of remembering and reflecting on the Srebrenica Genocide as a case of global failure to act to stop mass murder, then perhaps we have truly learned nothing.