

4. A CONTRIBUTION TO THE UNDERSTANDING OF THE DYNAMICS OF THE MASSACRES IN SREBRENICA

by Nika Vrbek*

Abstract: L'evento del luglio 1995 a Srebrenica, una piccola città nella Bosnia ed Erzegovina orientale (BeE), ha rappresentato uno dei crimini più efferati commessi sul suolo europeo dalla Seconda guerra mondiale. L'articolo, basato sull'analisi di fonti d'archivio di recente accesso conservate nell'Archivio del Centro Memoriale di Srebrenica-Potočari, di fonti pubblicate, di comunicazioni radiofoniche e telefoniche intercettate, di letteratura memorialistica, di una nuova testimonianza oculare, di altre testimonianze e dichiarazioni e della pertinente letteratura scientifica, esamina i massacri che seguirono la caduta dell'enclave di Srebrenica. L'operazione, condotta sotto la guida di alti funzionari serbo-bosniaci, fu accuratamente pianificata ed eseguita. A tal fine, l'autore fa luce in modo dettagliato sulle condizioni nell'enclave di Srebrenica al momento della sua caduta, nonché sulle dinamiche delle deportazioni e dei massacri.

Parole chiave: BeE, Srebrenica, esecuzioni, deportazioni, fosse comuni, luglio 1995.

Abstract: The July 1995 event in Srebrenica, a small town in eastern Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH), represents one of the most heinous crimes committed on European soil since the Second World War. This article, based on an analysis of newly accessible archive sources in the Archive of

* MA in history and doctoral candidate in history, University of Maribor Faculty of Arts, ORCID: 0009-0006-7378-5066, nika.vrbek@student.um.si.

This article was produced within the framework of the research project *AID HCH – Breakthrough in Humanities and Cultural Heritage with Artificial Intelligence*, No. J7-60128, funded by Slovenian Research in Innovation Agency.

Memorial Centre Srebrenica Potočari (AMCSP), published sources, intercepted radio and telephone communications, memoir literature, new eyewitness testimony, other testimonies and statements, and relevant scholarly literature, examines the massacres that followed the fall of the Srebrenica enclave. The operation, carried out under the leadership of senior Bosnian Serb officials, was planned and executed carefully. To this end, the author sheds detailed light on the conditions in the Srebrenica enclave at the time of its fall, as well as the dynamics of deportations and massacres.

Keywords: BiH, Srebrenica, executions, deportations, massive graves, July 1995.

Introduction

When speaking of the former Yugoslavia (Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia or SFRY) and its peoples, we speak of Slovenes, Serbs, Croats, Macedonians, Montenegrins, Kosovar Albanians, and Muslims – or Bosniaks. In doing so, we must not forget the national minorities: Hungarians, Italians, Bulgarians, Romanians, Ukrainians, Slovaks, Roma, Turks, and others. Yugoslavia, a crossroads of multiple cultures and languages, enshrined two scripts, Latin and Cyrillic, and three faiths: Catholic, Orthodox, and Islamic. After the Second World War, and subsequently following the last – Edvard Kardelj's – constitution, adopted on February 21, 1974, it was divided into six socialist republics: Serbia, BiH, Croatia, Slovenia, Macedonia, and Montenegro, and two autonomous provinces: *Vojvodina* and Kosovo (Pirjevec, 2003; Ramet, 2006).

For nearly fifty years, these diverse peoples have lived together. Yugoslavia began to turn into what might be called a powder keg in the Balkans once again, as it was shaken by a series

of events (Pirjevec, 1995). Moreover, the discontent (and rivalry) that had been evident between Croats and Serbs throughout the entire existence of the Yugoslav state spread, in the final years of Yugoslavia, to the Bosniaks in BiH as well (Pirjevec, 2003). Political pluralism began to take shape in Yugoslavia in 1988, starting with Slovenia and Croatia. In December 1990, Slovenes held a referendum (Pirjevec, 2003; Ramet, 2006).

Yugoslavia collapsed when Slovenia and subsequently Croatia declared independence at the end of June 1991. The Yugoslav People's Army (*Jugoslovenska ljudska armada* or JLA) first carried out aggression in Slovenia, but the latter emerged victorious after ten days of war (and a three-month moratorium). This was followed by a war in Croatia. While the war in Kosovo lasted the longest (1991-1995), if one considers the duration of the fighting by months, the war in BiH from 1992 to 1995 was one of the most intense and brutal since the Second World War (Ramet, 2002).

1. War in Bosnia and Herzegovina

As mentioned, Yugoslavia retained numerous unresolved problems after the Second World War; the Muslim question was but one of many. It is beyond dispute that the Bosniaks in the SFRY considered themselves to be neither Serbs nor Croats (Ramet, 2006; Ibrahimagić, 2015).

Tensions began to escalate during Aleksandar Ranković's time – a Serbian politician and, until 1966, the head of the secret political police (known until 1946 as *Oddelek za zaščitno naroda* or OZNA, and subsequently known as *Uprava državne bezbednosti* or UDB/UDBA) – who implacably opposed the recognition of Bosniaks as a distinct people within the SFRY. Throughout the existence of postwar Yugoslavia, various conflicting theories about the origins of

Bosnian Muslims emerged. In the West, the best known to this day is the so-called Bogomil theory, which holds that certain Croats adopted Bogomilism. In the centuries that followed, these people were allegedly persecuted by both Orthodox Christians and Catholics, and consequently embraced Islam when it penetrated BiH with the Ottoman army. Therefore, the theory advances the thesis that Bosnian Muslims are Croats. The opposing theory is put forward by the Serbs, namely that Muslims are Serbian settlers in the territory of BiH who were converted to Islam by the Ottoman authorities. A third theory was devised by Muslim nationalists, who sought their ancestors in Anatolia, rejected any connection between Bogomilism and Christianity, and emphasised their Islamic origins. According to this theory, everything Slavic about Muslims is merely their language, which they adopted from the Slavs living in the region (Ramet, 2006; Branco, 2009).

Due to the desire to forge a single unified nation within the SFRY, Bosnian Muslims were left isolated. Neither Serbian nor Croatian politicians were prepared to accept them as anything more than a religious community. It was not until the census of 1971 that they were for the first time defined as a people living in the SFRY (Busuladžić, 2010; Ramet, 2006).

As in the other republics, a multi-party system began to emerge in BiH from the mid-1990 onwards. Three parties were dominant: the Party of Democratic Action, led by Izetbegović; the Croatian Democratic Union of Bosnia and Herzegovina, under the leadership of Mate Boban; and the Serbian Democratic Party, led by Radovan Karadžić the latter President of *Republika Srpska* (RS) (Thomas and Mikulan, 2006; Silber and Little, 1996). The situation in the BiH became increasingly tense throughout 1991. Like Slovenia, Croatia, and Macedonia, BiH submitted an application for international recognition by December 23, 1991. Slovenia and Croatia were attacked by the JLA immediately upon declaring

independence, while the attack on BiH came several months later (Thomas and Mikulan, 2006; Bilandžić, 1999), presumably due to the unexpected escalation of the war in Croatia.

The referendum in BiH was finally held between 29 February and 1 March 1992. It was intended for the Serbian part of BiH as well, but the Serbs boycotted it as well. The international community had, in the meantime, demanded that all three ethnic groups participate and recognise the results, but the situation became complicated. Despite this, the Sarajevo assembly forced through the referendum and ultimately carried it out. The ballot posed the following question: «Are you in favour of a sovereign and independent Bosnia and Herzegovina, a state of equal citizens and peoples of Muslims, Serbs, Croats, and others who live in it?» (Pirjevec 2003: 125). The voter turnout was 63.4 %. Due to the obvious opposition of the Serbs, the vast majority did not participate in the vote. They boycotted the referendum and, in response, erected barricades in Sarajevo during the night of 2 to March 3, 1992, with which they sought to prevent the counting of votes, but without success. Of those who participated in the vote, 99.43 % voted in favour of independence; these were predominantly Muslims and Croats (Bilandžić, 1999; Pirjevec, 2003).

On March 3 when the referendum results were announced, Izetbegović declared the independence of the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina. The war in BiH began on April 5, 1992, and lasted until December 1995 (Čekić, 2015; Pirjevec 2003; Ramet 2006). This was undoubtedly one of the most brutal civil wars in the territory of the former Yugoslavia. Due to the involvement of Croatia and the rump Yugoslavia, as well as the UN and North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), the conflict took on an international dimension.

2. The fall of the Srebrenica enclave

The degree of responsibility for the failure to resolve the crisis in the territory of the former Yugoslavia must be attributed to the disunity among European states, which were unable to reach an agreement on their approach in the Balkans. Until July 1995, numerous commissions were established within the framework of the European Community to resolve the crisis in the Balkans, and with it in BiH, seeking to address the situation through various measures (Ramet, 2002).

During the war, several resolutions were adopted within the framework of the UN Security Council; however, the most significant among them was the resolution adopted on June 8, 1992, in which the UN Security Council decided to send UNPROFOR to the territory of BiH. The following year, in April 1993, it became clear to the international community that they would not be able to protect Srebrenica. This gave rise to heightened tensions, compelling the UN to act more swiftly. Therefore, on April 16, 1993, the UN Security Council convened an emergency session at the proposal of the non-aligned states, which adopted Resolution No. 819, by which Srebrenica was declared a safe area (Pirjevec, 2003; Honig and Both, 1997; Resolution 819 (1993) – United Nations Digital Library).

Two days after the UN Security Council declared Srebrenica a safe area on April 18, 1993, a Canadian battalion (CANBAT), comprising around 150 soldiers (NIOD¹, 2002; Filipović, 2015), arrived with the aim of achieving a ceasefire and the surrender of weapons. Their mission lasted until 3 March 1994 (Nuhanović, 2007).

¹ NIOD is an acronym for the Netherlands Institute for War Documentation (Nederlands Instituut voor Oorlogsdocumentatie).

The best-known battalion sent to BiH was the Dutch one, known as DUTCHBAT or the blue helmets, commanded by the aforementioned Colonel Thom Karremans. The battalion arrived in the enclave on March 3, 1994, and consisted of 1.100 soldiers. From March 3, 1994, until July 11, 1995, the enclave was therefore “protected” by DUTCHBAT. Most Dutch units were stationed at the industrial complex in Potočari, just outside Srebrenica. DUTCHBAT operated as a peacekeeping force in Srebrenica. To avoid being perceived as intervention units, they were armed only with light weapons. Their tasks were to deter attacks in the area, monitor the ceasefire, encourage the withdrawal of (para)military forces, with the exception of Bosnian ones, secure certain key points in BiH, and participate in the delivery of humanitarian aid (Rijs, 2014; Willigen, 2016).

From the outbreak of the war in BiH, the Army of *Republika Srpska* (ARS) was professionally and hierarchically organised. Its supreme commander was the then President of RS, Karadžić, and the military commander was General Ratko Mladić. The Drina Corps (DC) was assigned to the eastern part of BiH and held great strategic significance as it was positioned between the then border of rump Yugoslavia and BiH (Trifunović, 2002).

The situation in the *Podrinje* area, where most of the aforementioned enclaves were located, including Srebrenica, began to deteriorate at the end of 1994 and early 1995. On March 8, 1995, RS President Karadžić issued Directive No. 7, in which the military and political objectives of the ARS were explained and defined. With regard to Srebrenica, the aim was to use military force to separate it from the Žepa enclave, thereby cutting off further communication between the two. This directive later served as the foundation for the strategic military operation known as *Krivaja '95* (Bootsma, 2002; NIOD, 2002; Čekić, 2012).

The implementation of the directive and the mentioned operation began on July 6, 1995, in the early morning hours (NIOD, 2002; Pirjevec, 2003). Some 2.000 Bosnian Serb members of the DC units simultaneously attacked the enclave from multiple directions. Meanwhile, around 750 lightly armed blue helmets guarded Srebrenica (Rhode, 1998; Pirjevec, 2003; Hikaru, 2017). On the afternoon of July 11, after five days of attack, the enclave fell, and General Mladić (among his soldiers and General Radislav Krstić) walked through it in the late afternoon. They strolled through the streets of Srebrenica, while a large number of refugees began moving on foot and fleeing to Potočari (Topić, 2005).

3. Refugees from enclave

Before the outbreak of the war, around 37.000 people lived in Srebrenica, the majority of whom were Bosniaks. During the war, increasing numbers of refugees began seeking shelter in the town and, from 1993, in the enclave. By 1995, the enclave had a population of approximately 60.000 (Pirjevec, 2003; Hikaru, 2017). Due to the large population in the enclave, they lived in conditions of scarcity. Witness Envera², born in 1986 near Srebrenica, confided in us that she remembers trucks carrying food arriving in the enclave, but that there was not enough food for everyone (Interview: Envera Mešić, 2024).

When the ARS took Srebrenica, civilians began fleeing en masse towards Potočari. The final destination was the UNPROFOR base in the former battery factory where DUTCHBAT soldiers were stationed (Honig and Both, 2002). However, after Srebrenica fell into

² The permission for the use of the oral testimony and the transcript are held by the author of this article.

the hands of the Bosnian Serb army, the refugees formed several groups to run. According to the NIOD report, four groups were formed. The first, estimated at between 20.000 and 25.000 refugees, took shelter in the UNPROFOR base in Potočari. The second, comprising between 10.000 and 15.000 refugees, first gathered in two northern villages of the enclave and set off on foot towards Tuzla. The third group consisted of between 700 and 800 refugees whose aim was to reach the territory of rump Yugoslavia (present-day Serbia). The fourth and final group consisted of between 300 and 850 people whose goal was to cross to the Žepa enclave. In addition to all of this, there was apparently yet another group mentioned in the NIOD report: To this day, it remains unclear how many people it comprised, but they are said to have left the enclave on 10 July, before Srebrenica had fallen (NIOD, 2002).

The Dutch in Potočari quickly realised that they would not be able to accommodate a larger number of refugees. The base could take in between 3.000 and 4.000 refugees, while the others had to find shelter in the area surrounding the base (Honig and Both, 1997; Karremans, 1998). Envera told us that her family managed to make their way into the base, where they slept on the floor under conditions of deprivation. They were short on food and water. She recalls how the children scurried around the legs of the UNPROFOR soldiers, trying to preserve their childlike spirit (Interview: Envera Mešić, 2024).

4. Deportation of men, women and children

However, the worst began when Colonel Karremans returned from his third and final meeting with General Mladić in the nearby town of Bratunac. At the three meetings – which it is now clear were dictated by Mladić – the two “agreed” that the ARS would

take care of relocating the refugees to territory liberated for them and under the control of the Army of the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina (ARBiH). At the meeting, the two agreed that Serbian soldiers would screen all males between the ages of 17 and 70 before the evacuation, as they were considered to be of military age and capable of resisting if given the opportunity (Karremans 1998; Topić 2005).

Nevertheless, Mladić gave Karremans the opportunity to organise the means of transport for the evacuation of the Bosniaks from Srebrenica, which they had agreed upon at the meeting. Karremans wished to do so, as is evident from the messages he sent to the Red Cross headquarters in Geneva, but he received no response. These messages are now accessible in the Archive of the Srebrenica Memorial Centre in Potočari (AMCSP – Archival fond: Judgements of the Hague Tribunal, archival box 1).

Within just a few hours, the Serbian leadership managed to gather the first buses and trucks, which arrived at noon on July 12 in front of the sports stadium in Bratunac, with some of them also arriving in front of the UNPROFOR base in Potočari. Shortly before this, Mladić entered Potočari. Children recalled him handing out sweets, while others received bread. It was also at this point that he addressed them for the first time, telling them that they would be transferred to wherever they wished to go (Topić, 2005). A man who survived the massacres testified to this effect before the court: «He also distributed some sweets and filmed the whole thing with a camera. They wanted to show the world how humane they are. When they committed genocide, they filmed nothing.» (Bogoeva and Fetscher, 2005: 118).

The first buses departed from in front of Potočari on July 12 between 2 and 3 p.m. (NIOD, 2002). Due to the chaos and unpreparedness of the Serbian soldiers, some men managed to board the buses. However, once the Serbian soldiers became aware

of this, they prevented most of them from being taken away. The final destination of the first buses was Kladanj, a small village in the Federation, that is, on territory liberated for Bosniaks by the ARBiH. In the late afternoon hours, the first groups on the Tišća–Kladanj route managed to reach their destination, and by the end of the day, 11.000 women, children, and the elderly had arrived in Kladanj (Topić, 2005).

On the first day, July 12, in the late afternoon, ARS soldiers and units of the special police, which had arrived in Potočari in the early morning hours, began separating men from among the civilians. The separation of men from their families is said to have lasted throughout the night and continued the following day. Only a small number of those who were taken away managed to survive (Van der Wind, 1995).

One of the survivors later testified before the court in the case against Krstić, recounting how Serbian soldiers had torn her son from her arms – a boy who was only 14 years old – and killed him. She stated that in Potočari, as they were trying to board the buses, they were arranged into two lines: on the right were women, children, and boys under 15 years of age, while on the left were men between 15 and 65 years of age. Her eldest son and husband walked on the left side, while she walked on the right with her younger sons. Suddenly, a Serbian soldier spots her and tears her son away. The boy tried to tell the soldier that he was only fourteen years old, born in 1981, and therefore too young to be on the left, but to no avail. The witness saw both her sons and her husband for the last time on that day (Bogoeva and Fetscher, 2005).

According to Envera's account, the deportations on July 13 were carried out using trucks. It is highly likely that the buses returning from the border between RS and the ARBiH-liberated territory were redirected to Bratunac, where they were needed for the renewed deportation of men. Envera's (interviewee) eldest

brother was 13 years old in 1995. Although he had not yet reached the age threshold, it is clear from the above that younger boys were also taken. Out of fear that soldiers might redirect him to the other line at the last moment, he was dressed up to look like a girl at his mother's suggestion. This most likely saved his life:

«I had an older brother who was not even 14 years old at the time, and the others were younger. As we walked towards the truck, Mum said we should dress my brother to look like a woman, so that they would not. It was happening that ten-year-old boys, little boys, were taken. If they were 15, they were set aside, torn away from their mothers, and told they could not go with them. We dressed my brother up, mum put a headscarf on his head as well. We dressed him up like that and gave him a backpack to make him look as small as possible. We then boarded the truck. They took us on an open truck to the border – or rather, I do not remember where exactly they took us» (Interview: Envera Mešić, 2024).

There is not much archival material concerning the complex question of the deportation of men, nor indeed many testimonies, as only a small number of survivors remained. Witnesses, whose statements have been collected since 1995, recall that part of the group had already broken away in Srebrenica. This group consisted mainly of men who attempted to flee through forests (Jusuf, 1997). Among them was Envera's father: «But unfortunately, my dad had to leave us. He said he was going across into the forest with the soldiers and friends and that we would meet up in Tuzla. That we would meet and that we should go by trucks and buses. He told me that, unfortunately, he could not go with us to the other side» (Interview: Envera Mešić, 2024). It is evident that, at the time of the enclave's fall, the men understood that the worst could befall them, yet they hoped that at least their wives, mothers, fathers, and children would be taken care of.

The majority of the men were deported on the second day of deportations – that is, on 13 July – by buses organised by the Bosnian Serb soldiers to Bratunac, to the abandoned *Vuk Karadžić* primary school. However, a survivor recalled that soldiers continuously brought new Bosniaks to the aforementioned school throughout the night. From the memoirs, statements, and testimonies examined, we can conclude that these newly brought men were Bosniaks who had been captured by Serbian soldiers while attempting to make their way to territory liberated for them (Jusuf, 1997).

The dynamics of the capture of the fugitives (men who had fled the enclave at the time of its fall) unfolded as follows: after ARS soldiers learned of the groups of fugitives, they decided to hunt them down. The majority were intercepted between the two villages Bratunac and Konjević Polje – two villages not far from Srebrenica. In the course of our research, we came across the testimony of a survivor who had been captured by Serbian soldiers. He stated that the Serbian soldiers first opened fire on them and repeatedly ordered them to surrender. When the fugitives refused to do so, the soldiers set an ambush for them during the night near a nearby village and captured them. The survivor also stated that they were forced to run to Bratunac with their hands raised and three fingers extended – a gesture that to this day represents the Serbian salute (Bogoeva and Fetscher, 2005). As is evident from certain testimonies, the scene was witnessed by children and women in passing buses (Udruženje građana, 1998).

What is most frequently mentioned in testimonies and in the literature is that the men were separated from the women at the very outset and deported to the execution sites on separate trucks. We can say that the testimonies regarding the deportations partly differ from one another, which is, of course, entirely understandable, while at the same time, they also complement the complexity of the

deportations. This aspect of the deportations – that of Bosniaks captured in various ways in the surrounding forests – has until now been mentioned less frequently.

5. Violence

5.1 UNPROFOR base in Potočari

To date, several authors have already addressed the question of when and where the decision was made – and above all by whom – to execute the captured Bosniaks. Some previous authors, such as Rasim Muratović, former director of the Institute for the Research of Crimes against Humanity and International Law in Sarajevo, found evidence suggesting that General Krstić was responsible for this decision (Muratović, 2012). Historian Smail Čekić, who examined the documents, found among them Mladić's ARS directive of 19 November 1992, in which it was allegedly clearly stated that following the surrender of weapons by the Bosniaks, the local population was to be destroyed (Čekić, 2012). Journalist Mehmed Pargan, meanwhile, uncovered several documents concerning the executions in *Podrinje*. For instance, on 13 July 1995, the DC reported that a decision had been made to cleanse *Podrinje* of Bosniaks (Pargan, 2004). In the course of our research, we discovered a document mentioning a meeting in Vlasenica (a village near the enclave) at which General Mladić ordered the liquidation of all those captured Bosniaks (AMCSP – Archival fond Documents of the Main Staff of the Army of Republika Srpska, specifically the orders section, archival box 6).

The Srebrenica massacre was defined as genocide by the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) (Facts about Srebrenica – ICTY). The first acts of violence and

killings began to occur after the enclave fell into Serbian hands, already within the base in Potočari. As we have no archival documentation of such killings, we relied on examining this part on the testimonies, statements, and memoirs of survivors. On 12 July, the first day, it was calm in Potočari; however, immediately after the arrival of Serbian soldiers at the base, the first atrocities began to unfold during the night of 12 to 13 July. From the report submitted by Dutch General Onno Van der Wind, we learn that Serbian soldiers also killed several DUTCHBAT members, took their uniforms, dressed in them, and in this way began first with the intimidation and subsequently with the killing of Bosniaks (Van der Wind, 1995).

To this day, the question of whether soldiers of UNPROFOR, alongside Serbian soldiers, also carried out violence against refugees in Potočari remains open and unexplained. However, we have significantly more evidence of violence committed by Serbian soldiers. We rely here primarily on the testimonies of survivors. One of them stated that she saw Serbian soldiers begin to walk among the refugees during the night of July 11th to 12th, intimidating them (Udruženje, građana, 1998). That the fear felt by women, the elderly, and children was justified is confirmed by another witness, who recalls the words of Serbian soldiers: «We will kill you. Where have you gone now? We will find you wherever you hide. We will kill all your men, not one will be left» (Državna komisija, 1995: 121).

Already the next day, July 12th, a third witness recalls violence committed against her by Serbian soldiers. She remembers that she had gone to get bread for the children when a Serbian soldier she knew seized her, drove her into a room, groped her, and in the end ordered her not to tell anyone about it (Udruženje građana, 1998).

As we have already mentioned, on July 12th and 13th, the separation of men from women took place. Previous research

describes how Serbian soldiers took men who had slipped through and were trying to smuggle themselves onto the buses with their families to a large building that stood across from the UNPROFOR base, known as the “White House”. There, they were forced to leave behind all their belongings, including documents, which Serbian soldiers later burned. Some were tortured inside, and in the end, all were killed. On July 12th, Mladić himself entered the White House building, greeted the prisoners, and asked whether they knew who he was. Some reportedly nodded, while others preferred to remain silent. One of the Dutch soldiers present later recalled that Mladić then replied: «If you don’t know me yet, you will from now on» (Čekić, 2012: 308). To this day, it remains unexplained how many died in that building and how old they were.

5.2 Massive executions

As mentioned earlier, Serbian soldiers first transported the men from the UNPROFOR base by bus to the primary school in Bratunac. During the night of July 12th to 13th, other men who had previously fled the enclave – as described above – were also brought to the primary school. The pattern of the massacres followed a consistent sequence (Topić, 2015; Udruženje građana, 1998). Some men were killed right at the primary school in Bratunac. One survivor recalls that Serbian soldiers took several men away during the night, and none of those taken ever returned (Jennings, 2013).

The pattern of the killings was systematic. First, Bosniaks were transported from Bratunac by bus to abandoned halls, hangars, farms, and other facilities within the jurisdiction of the ARS (NIOD, 2002). The first mass executions happened on July 13th along the Jadar River. The largest-scale killings occurred in the Cerska valley, where about 150 people were reportedly killed. According to the NIOD report, the command of the DC must have

been involved in both massacres (NIOD, 2002; B-Baden – Srebrenica Sense Centar).

The most infamous killing site, which became a symbol of the massacres following the fall of the enclave in July 1995, was located in Kravica, a small village surrounded by mountains near Bratunac. Serbian forces reportedly transported around 1.000-1.500 men there (NIOD, 2002; Jennings, 2013). Three men survived the Kravica massacre and later claimed that around 2.000 to 2.500 people had been present. Intercepted communications between the ARS leadership and soldiers confirm that 2.000 “packages” or “pies” – as Bosniaks were called in conversations – were brought to Kravica. Research also shows that Serbian soldiers used another derogatory term for Bosniaks, namely “*balj*” (Dnevni izveštaj RI – Srebrenica Sense Centar), which remains a slur for Bosnian Muslims today.

The next massacre site was Konjević Polje (400), about which we have the most information from eyewitnesses who were among the last to be transported from Potočari to liberated territory. They said they saw their husbands, brothers, and sons sitting with their hands bound, and never saw them again (Udruženje građana, 1998). Additional massacre sites, where killings occurred in the same manner as those previously mentioned locations, include Tišća (3.000), Pilica (3.000), Gabrovci, Orahovac (2.000–2.500), and Branjevo (1.200), where a Slovenian named Franc Kos also took part in the killings. Other execution sites were Petkovci (1.500–2.000), Kamenica (1.000), Kaldrmica (150), and Kozluk (500)³ (NIOD, 2002; Udruženje građana, 1998).

³ The figures in brackets indicating how many Bosniaks were killed at specific sites are recorded on the basis of the report issued by NIOD and on witness statements.

5.3 Executions of captured fugitives

From preserved documents it is evident that within the ARS, those men who had managed to escape and were hiding in the forests were assessed as a serious threat. One of the reports covering the preceding period, dated September 5th, 1995, shows that large numbers of Bosniaks (3.500-4.000) were hiding in the forests, with whom they had been engaged in combat particularly from July 16th onwards (AMCSP – 12 – TK – 0266, Herbar IX).

Thanks to newly available documents, we can add to the massacres the men who were captured by Serbian soldiers south of the Srebrenica enclave. These men had fled the enclave before the arrival of Serbian soldiers and decided to try their luck to the south. Many of them escaped the enclave through trenches, and when the ARS learned of this, it dispatched part of its units southward. According to rough estimates by Serbian soldiers, around 7.000 had escaped through the trenches (AMCSP – Archival fond: Documents of the Main Staff of the Army of Republika Srpska, specifically the orders section, archival box 2).

New documents also show that executions took place after July 19th. At that time, 8 Bosniaks were reportedly captured south of the enclave and “neutralized” (AMCSP – 12 – TK – 0529, Herbar XX). The documents further mention that on July 20th, a company of special police units from Sarajevo captured and liquidated a Bosniak near the village of Vlasenica. The day after, 20 more Bosniaks were discovered and liquidated. During the night of July 21st to 22nd, the units captured yet another Bosniak. During road surveillance between Kamenica and Orahovac, an additional 300 men were captured and liquidated between July 17th and 21st (AMCSP – 12 – TK – 0153, Herbar V; Fond za humanitarno pravo, 2017).

Less well known is what happened to the Bosniaks who attempted to flee to Serbian territory. On July 21st, they were

reportedly captured by Serbs near Bajina Bašta (in today's Serbia) and liquidated – said to have been four men (AMCSP – 12 – TK – 0160, Herbar V). It is also known today from various reports and documents that Serbian units moved some captured Bosniaks to collection centres (which resembled camps) in town of Vlasenica, Kneževina, Batković, and elsewhere (Fond za humanitarno pravo, 2017). However, the question of their fate remains open.

5.4 Massive graves

After carrying out the orders, ARS soldiers began burying the victims. First, they requisitioned special machines – excavators – with which they loaded the bodies of Bosniaks onto trucks and transported them to mass graves that had been prepared in advance. Some of the ARS soldiers later admitted in court that they had known about General Mladić's orders regarding the burial and killing of Bosniaks, and with regard to the graves, stated that they had known about the reburial of bodies from primary graves into new, secondary graves. One soldier testified in court that on September 15th, 1995, he first heard of new orders for large quantities of fuel and learned that the DC had decided to rebury the bodies. From the court testimony, it is evident that the reburials were carried out by members of engineering units and some members of the special military police (Izjava o činjenicama kako ih je naveo Dragan Obrenović – Srebrenica Sense Centar).

We do not have a precise answer as to why, even today, there are primary and secondary mass graves in the *Podrinje* region, where the executions took place. However, we can only conclude that the leadership of the RS became alarmed when the international community learned of the executions, and that to conceal the number of those killed, they created secondary massive graves.

After indictments were issued against the main perpetrators, forensic experts arrived in eastern BiH and began excavating both primary and secondary graves. Evidence for the existence of secondary graves was provided by the discovery of a single person's remains in two different grave sites. Dušan Janc, a Slovenian criminal investigator who prepared a report for the ICTY prosecution, noted that by the end of 2013, a total of 6.849 victims had been identified (Srebrenica Mass Graves, Primary and Secondary Mass Grave Aerial Imagery – Srebrenica Sense Centar; Janc, 2013). In the following years, as is evident from various online sources, the number of the missing rose to 8.372⁴, which subsequently became widely accepted as the total number of those killed.

Conclusions

Through the analysis of archival material not previously used for scholarly purposes, extensive literature, reports, and other published sources less familiar to research circles, as well as statements and testimonies of survivors, we have arrived at important findings regarding the deportations and massacres. Nevertheless, we still do not have proper explanations regarding the political background and the true reasons for the killings.

Finally, we wish to point out that certain gaps remain in the case of the deportations and massacres as well. Among the greatest is the quantification of those killed. A comparison of all the data we obtained in our research reveals an approximate figure that is considerably higher than the previously established number of 8.372. The data obtained in the course of our research indicate that the

⁴ Numerous other sites and authors refer to List of Victims, available at: <https://srebrenica.org.uk/what-happened/list-victims>.

number of those killed was somewhere between 20.000 and 24.000. However, even in citing these figures, we must remain critical and note that these are numbers put forward primarily by Bosniak authors and survivors, from which we may conclude that there is, at least in part, some degree of exaggeration.

This year marks the 31st anniversary of the events that shook the international public, and relatives of the killed – whose remains have not been found – still live in BiH or elsewhere, from which we might conclude that not all mass graves have yet been excavated, therefore confirming our skepticism regarding the quantification.

The second question that remains unexplained is the question of the periodisation of the Srebrenica massacres of July 1995 – namely, when they actually came to an end. We have presented new, often overlooked data regarding the fugitives who fled southward and toward Serbian territory, and their fate, which was similar to that of those who remained in the enclave.

The Dayton Agreement, which ended the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina just over thirty years ago, left the *Podrinje* region – where the executions were carried out – to the Serbs. Today, this area, together with the former enclave of Srebrenica, forms part of the *Republika Srpska*. This opens up other, new questions – above all, why, at the signing of the Dayton Agreement, the decision was made to assign the *Podrinje* region and the area of the former Srebrenica enclave to *Republika Srpska*. However, that is a topic for an entirely new research endeavour.

Bibliography

AMCSP – Archive of Memorial Center Srebrenica Potočari. Archival fond: Documents of the Main Staff of the Army of the Republika Srpska, specifically the orders section, archival box 2 and 6.

AMCSP – Archive of Memorial Center Srebrenica Potočari. Archival fond (without the name of the fonds; partially arranged material, marked with “Herbarji”).

AMCSP – Archive of Memorial Center Srebrenica Potočari. Archival fond: Judgements of the Hague Tribunal, archival box 1.

[Without author] (1998). “Svjedočenja”. In Ž. Jusuf (Eds.), Srebrenica 1995., Knjiga 1: Zločini nad Bošnjacima u Srebrenici za vrijeme agresije na Republiku Bosnu i Hercegovinu 1991.–1995. (pp. 292-340). Sarajevo: CPU P.J. RAIL PRINT.

B-Baden – Srebrenica Sense Centar. Retrieved from <https://srebrenica.sensecentar.org/assets/Uploads/hr-3-11-intercept-karadzic-bcs.pdf>.

Bilandžić, D. (1999). Hrvatska moderna povijest. Zagreb: Golden Marketing.

Bogoeva, J. & Fetscher, C. (Eds.) (2005). Srebrenica, dokumenti, pričevanja, haaški proces. Ljubljana: Študentska založba. (Original work published 2002).

Bootsma, P. (2002). Srebrenica, Het officiële NIOD-rapport samengevat. Amsterdam: Boom.

Busuladžić, A. (2010). The Bosniaks: Failing Role Models for Muslim Europeans. *International journal of Euro-Mediterranean studies* 3 (2), 211-222.

Čekić, S. (2012). Genocid i istina o genocidu u Bosni i Hercegovini. Sarajevo: University of Sarajevo.

Čekić, S. (2015). Planiranje in pripremanje agresija na Republiku Bosnu i Hercegovinu i genocida nad Bošnjacima. In Š. Hodžić (Eds.), *Obaveza i čast braniti Bosnu i Hercegovinu*; Zbornik radova sa naučnog skupa održanog 27. marta 2015. godine u Sarajevu (pp. 16-93). Sarajevo: Štamparija Fojnica.

Dnevni izveštaj RI – Srebrenica Sense Centar. Retrieved from <https://docs.rferl.org/shsh/2020/06/22/e0537ef8-c04b-4195-b386-368795c11388.pdf>.

Državna komisija za prikupljanje činjenica o ratnim zločinima Tuzla (1995), *Ratni zločini na Tuzlanskom okrugu (1992–1995)*; knjiga druga. Tuzla: Grafocoop.

Facts about Srebrenica – ICTY. Retrieved from https://www.icty.org/x/file/Outreach/view_from_hague/jit_srebrenica_en.pdf.

Filipović, V. (2015). *Ispod plavih šljemova: motivi država za sudjelovanjem u misiji UNPROFOR 1992.-1995*. Zagreb: University Press-Magistrat.

Fond za humanitarno pravo (2017). *Dosije: Deportacija izbeglica iz Srebrenice*. Beograd: Instant System.

Hikaru, Y. (2017). *Humanitarian Space and International Politics; The Creation of Safe Areas*. New York: Routledge.

Honig, J. W. & Both, N. (1997). *Srebrenica: Record of a War Crime*. London: Penguin Publishing Group.

Ibrahimagić, O. (2015). Državno-pravni kontinuitet Bosne i Hercegovine i pitanje njene nacije. In Š. Hodžić (Eds.), *Obaveza i čast*

braniti Bosnu i Hercegovinu; Zbornik radova sa naučnog skupa obdržanog 27. marta 2015. godine u Sarajevu (pp. 7-15). Sarajevo: Štamparija Fojnica.

Interview: Envera Mešić (2024).

Izjava o činjenicama kako ih je naveo Dragan Obrenović – Srebrenica Sense Centar. Retrieved from <https://srebrenica.sensecentar.org/assets/Uploads/sg-4-03-obrenovic-bcs.pdf>.

Janc, D. (2013). Istraga o Srebrenici, Dopunjeni rezime forenzičkog dokaznog materijala – ekshumacija grobnica i otkrivanje površinskih ostanka u vezi sa Srebrenicom. Haag. Retrieved from <https://srebrenica.sense-agency.com/assets/Uploads/sg-2-08-rezie-bcs.pdf>.

Jennings, C. (2013). Bosnia's Million Bones; Solving the World's greatest Forensic Puzzle. New York: St. Martin's Press.

Karremans, T. (1998). Srebrenica, Who cares? Een puzzel van de werkelijkheid. Nieuwegein: Arko Uitgeverij.

List of Victims – Srebrenica.org. Retrieved from <https://srebrenica.org.uk/what-happened/list-victims>.

Martins Branco, C. M. (2009). The Muslim National Question in Bosnia. A Historical Overview and an Analytical Reappraisal, *Revista Militar* 2488 (1), 567-626.

Muratović, R. (2012). Holokaust nad Jevrejima i genocid nad Bošnjacima. Sarajevo: Štamparija Fojnica.

NIOD (2002). Srebrenica: Reconstruction, background, consequences and analyses of the fall of a 'safe' area. Amsterdam: NIOD.

Nuhanović, H. (2007). Under the UN Flag: The International Community and the Srebrenica Genocide. Sarajevo: DES Sarajevo.

Pargan, M. (2004). Srebrenica – dokumenti o genocidu. Tuzla: Kulturno-umjetničko društvo "Srednje Podrinje".

Pirjevec, J. (1995). Jugoslavija 1918-1992: Nastanek, razvoj ter razpad Karadjordjevićeve in Titove Jugoslavije. Koper: Lipa.

Pirjevec, J. (2003), Jugoslovanske vojne: 1991-2001. Ljubljana: Cankarjeva založba.

Ramet, S. P. (2002). Balkan Babel. The Disintegration of Yugoslavia from the Death of Tito to the War for Kosovo. Boulder: Westview Press.

Ramet, S. P. (2006). The Three Yugoslavias: state building and legitimation, 1918-2005. Bloomington-Indianapolis-Indiana: Woodrow Wilson Center Press with Indiana University Press.

Resolution 819 (1993) – United Nations Digital Library. Retrieved from <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/164939?v=pdf>.

Rijs, W. (2014). State Responsibility for the Conduct of UN Forces – Consequences for the future UN Missions? Lessons from the Dutch Rulings on Liability of The Netherlands for Acts of Dutchbat during the UNPROFOR Mission in Srebrenica. International Journal of Rule of Law, Transitional Justice and Human Rights 5(1), 51-64.

Rohde, D. (1998). *Endgame: the betrayal and fall of Srebrenica, Europe's worst massacre since World War II*. Boulder: Farrar Straus & Giroux.

Silber, L. & Little, A. (1996). *Smrt Jugoslavije*. Ljubljana: Co Libri.

Srebrenica Mass Graves, Primary and Secondary Mass Grave Aerial Imagery – Srebrenica Sense Centar. Retrieved from <https://srebrenica.sensecentar.org/assets/Uploads/sg-2-02-massgraves.pdf>, pridobljeno.

Thomas, N. & Krunoslav, M. (2006) *The Yugoslav Wars (2); Bosnia, Kosovo and Macedonia 1992–2001*. Oxford: Osprey Publishing.

Topić, T. (2005). Zastrašujuća srebrenička istina. In S. Biserko (Eds.), *Srebrenica: od poriciranja do priznanja* (pp. 769-783). Beograd: Helsinški odbor za ljudska prava u Srbiji.

Trifunović, D. (2002). Report about case Srebrenica: (the first part). Banja Luka: GRAFID.

Udruženje građana »Žene Srebrenice« (1999). *Samrtno Srebreničko ljeto '95*. Tuzla: PrintCom.

Van der Wind, O. (1995). Report Based on the Debriefing on Srebrenica. Assen.

Willigen, N. (2016). A Dutch return to UN peacekeeping?. *International Peacekeeping* 23, (5), 702-78.