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Bystanders in Bosnia and Herzegovina during the Conflict in the 1990s

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Summary

Research on the Holocaust introduced the concept of *bystander* in order to describe the civilian population passively tolerating atrocities committed against the Jewish population, which was actively encouraged by the German national socialist propaganda. Subsequently, a more general approach to this concept has been employed to integrate it in a wider range of armed conflicts. This article discusses the applicability of the bystander concept in the context of the conflict in Bosnia and Herzegovina during the 1990s. In our case study, the media, in particular in the United States, ascribed the role of the bystander to the U.S. government, thus calling for its military action. Based on witness accounts, as well as reports from legal records from the International Crime Tribunal for Yugoslavia and other sources, the author emphasizes key differences in the constellation of the conflict between the Holocaust and the conflict in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Propaganda by the local media first cast individuals in ethnic terms, and then actively mobilized the population to take active roles in the conflict. Moreover, systematic traumatization was a commonly used means to further polarize the civilian population along ethnic lines, eliminating any space for passive observers. Thus, the applicability of the concept of bystander on the local population in Bosnia and Herzegovina is called into question.

Keywords: Bystanders, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Military Intervention, Ethnic Mobilization, Security Dilemma

Introduction

Historiography and other disciplines in the social sciences, especially psychology, have undergone a process of maturation, through which a better understanding of the Holocaust and genocide has been attained. The concept of bystander put an end to the dichotomous dimension of history writing about perpetrators versus victims

(Marrus 1987). As a result of this conceptual novum, a new perspective on the Holocaust and the procedural character of the atrocities against the Jews has been developed.

The category of bystander has been identified and approached on different levels: national, organizational, like Church (Barnett 1999), and individual. Within those levels, different definitions of bystander have been given. Thus, in his pioneering work on bystanders, Hilberg introduced three subgroups of bystanders in a phenomenological descriptive manner, which he defined according to their relationship to the victims, i. e. helpers, gainers, and onlookers (Hilberg 1992). While onlookers are characterized as essentially passive witnesses to mass murder, who may or may not support the killings, helpers and gainers take a more active part in the process, either through direct intervention, or by taking advantage of oppression by taking over vacated flats or other stolen property. Thus, the role of a bystander implies different types and scales of (in)action, endowed with different degrees of moralization, which has been immanent in the literature so far.

A more general approach to bystander-behaviour, which tries to extend beyond the context of the Holocaust by including bystander behaviour in everyday situations under peaceful circumstances, has been offered by Bar-On (2001). The author distinguishes bystanders according to their situational positions and provides several categories, e.g. eyewitnesses, distant listeners, etc. Another aspect of this wider categorization represents the bystanders' exposure to the victimization process, as well as the hierarchical nature of social order, which contextualizes bystanders. As a result of this more subtle classification, Bar-On introduces several categories focusing on onlookers, and defining them by their motives:

- opportunist bystander: too involved in his career and despite information (s)he might have, career is put in the foreground
- ideologically driven bystander: mostly among intellectuals, who even might have become perpetrators
- distant bystander
- other-hating bystander
- institutional-rational bystander.

The ambiguity and fluidity of the concept of bystander has been shown in recent research conducted on states, which have been officially presented and praised as being neutral, but turned out to be – at least economically – involved in on-going conflicts, and therefore facilitated the destruction process (Cesarani & Levine 2002, p. 4).

Still, most researchers seem to conclude that bystanders played a crucial role in the Holocaust and often raise some moral issues pointing to the bystanders' (in)di-

rect contribution to the development of the atrocities against the Jews in World War II. On the other hand, many authors, often departing from a historical perspective and the Holocaust, have tried to reflect on the bystanders' role in future conflicts by emphasizing their potential in preventing or halting group violence (Staub 2000).

An important question that remains unanswered is the extent to which the concept of bystander, which has been discussed mainly in the context of the Holocaust, can be applied to other cases of genocide and group violence. Is the concept of bystander generally applicable to conflict constellations, and if so, which contextual preconditions does it require?

Although this paper does not intend to provide any conclusive answers, it aims at discussing some of these aspects by exploring the example of the Balkan conflicts. I have chosen to focus on the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina in the 1990s, and specifically the role of bystanders within that context. The war in Croatia will be regarded only marginally.

The first part of the paper presents a short overview of the major atrocities committed in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Next, I will examine different levels at which the concept of bystander could be applied. Which states have been considered as bystanders? Which organizations have been labelled bystanders? Who writes about bystanders in Bosnia and Herzegovina? And finally, can we employ the term bystander in this context at all? The answers require a qualitative differentiation of (quasi) research, which has been conducted in this field with regards to its provenience and (political) objectives etc. I shall try to present local as well as foreign publications on the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and will introduce personal accounts given in diaries or interviews, which provide insight into everyday life under war conditions, and the bystander-like behaviour that is shaped and explained on the individual level.

Atrocities in Bosnia and Herzegovina

From the outset, the nature of the conflict in Bosnia and Herzegovina has been subject to conflicting interpretation. From one perspective, the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina can be viewed as a symptomatic case of civil war, i.e. an internal war among groups unable to agree on arrangements for sharing power. Some of the parties involved enjoyed substantial political and military backing from neighbouring states. Conversely, the international decision to recognize the independence of Bosnia and Herzegovina provided a basis for defining the war as a case of external aggression by both Serbia and Croatia (Burg & Shoup 1999, p. 201).

Nevertheless, the conflict resulted in the first large-scale military conflict in Europe since 1945 with numerous massacres, the most widely known one being the massacre in Srebrenica in July 1995. Atrocities have been committed against

each of the three ethnic groups as such, notably not with the aim to exterminate, but rather to expel civilians from certain parts of the country in order to create ethnically purified regions of Bosnia and Herzegovina (Magnusson 2006, p. 53). As a consequence, the war in Bosnia turned into a mosaic of conflicts with various ethnical constellations on a regional level. Depending on the ethnic group that dominated in the territory, brutal campaigns of ethnic cleansing were initiated, mostly against Muslims/Bosniaks, but also against Croats and Serbs.

The most widely reported atrocities that initially raised concern were the shellings in Sarajevo, in particular the shelling of a breadline in Markale in Sarajevo on May 27, 1992, which killed scores of civilians (Bugarel 2004, p. 33). The Sarajevans were exposed to continuous attacks, which lasted until the end of the war. Although not reported by the Western media, in the summer of 1993, massacres were committed against Sarajevan Serbs, mostly by Muslim/Bosniak paramilitary forces, which has also been confirmed by recently discovered mass graves of Serbs.

Regarding the regions outside Sarajevo, most of the massacres that took place were shorter in duration and were restricted to certain parts of Bosnia and Herzegovina. I will cite only a few, and to the extent that they are characteristic of the wave of ethnic cleansing.

Kozarac and the whole eastern Bosnia region serves as an example of the first climaxed ethnic cleansing, in which several Muslim/Bosniak villages (in the Prijedor region) were surrounded and shelled, and large numbers of inhabitants massacred (Burg & Shoup 1999, p. 173). The waves of ethnic cleansing in this region were mainly carried out by local militia and Serbian Democratic Party (Srpska demokratska stranka, SDS) activists, accompanied by Serbian paramilitary forces. Most women and children were spared incarceration and death, but were left at the mercy of their tormentors. Many women, as will be noted later, became victims of rape. Refugees trying to escape the fighting ran the risk of being shelled. Men and boys, on the other hand, were either detained or killed outright, either upon capture or during incarceration. The Prijedor region, for example, is well known for Serb-held detention camps, one of them being Keraterm, which held between 1000 and 1400 prisoners (Magnusson 2006, p. 64). In The Hague Tribunal, the incarceration in Keraterm was extensively analysed and documented in the Sikić case (Magnusson 2006, pp. 63-67). Other regions known for massacres include Northern Herzegovina, where the brutal ethnic cleansing of Muslim/Bosniaks was conducted by Serbian paramilitaries. The Serb campaign of ethnic cleansing established a pattern that was followed by other groups and on other occasions, albeit not on the same scale.

Thus, Serbs too became victims, especially in the region of Odžak and Posavina, where they were expelled (and many of them slaughtered) by Croatian forces. In

May 1992, Serbs were also victims of slaughter in a part of Sarajevo called Pofalići. However, those who experienced persecution and torture have later testified and reported to have received help from their Muslim/Bosniak friends and neighbours.

Croats were also victims of ethnic cleansing in the early stages of the war in the region of Bosanski Brod where Serbs took control.

Nonetheless, Srebrenica is the area most prominently known for ethnic cleansing, notably in connection to the massacre in the summer of 1995. Prior to that event, other massacres were carried out by Serbs and Muslims, and although smaller in scale, these took place in and around Srebrenica. However, they were not considered worth any attention by the media.

The most brutally fought conflicts took place in Srebrenica and the wider region. However, the culmination of the atrocities has been identified with the massacre which took place towards the end of events in Srebrenica. From July 14th to 17th, 1995, Bosniak soldiers and civilians, mostly unarmed Muslim men and boys seeking to escape Srebrenica, were executed by Serbian soldiers. The total number of victims, although not yet ascertained, is, according to the ICTY, estimated to be between 7,000 and 8,000 individuals. While the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina, as such, has clearly not been defined as genocide, the case of Srebrenica does constitute a case of genocide according to the ICTY. This definition of a single local case within the war has been advocated by Bassiouni, who, in his final report, claimed that genocide may have been committed on the local level.¹ He argues as follows:

The question of genocide is a little more complicated because of the way the convention is drafted in terms of requiring a specific intent in the way it was carried out, and as to whether or not the convention is to be interpreted as encompassing an entire group. We at the Commission took a more progressive look at it and said that genocide should be interpreted not in light of an entire group, as was the interpretation that followed the Holocaust because that was the pattern that was taken by the Nazis, but rather to look at it in terms of more specific contexts. So that if you took, for example, the context of Prijedor, where 56,000 Bosnians are missing and a large number of them were killed, particularly the intellectual elite, the leadership, et cetera – if you took that context, that is, the Prijedor context, then you can find an intent to eliminate in whole or in part a particular group within that context.²

¹ About critical reflection on that report and its inventive definition of local genocide see Magnusson 2006, p. 59f.

² Bassiouni M. Cherif, "Genocide in Bosnia-Herzegovina", 1995 (cited in Magnusson 2006, p. 74).

Regarding total death tolls, several figures have been estimated. The figure of 250 000 deaths, which has often been quoted by Muslim politicians and intellectuals (see e.g. Imamović 1997, p. 11) has proven to be clearly exaggerated. The Norwegian-financed independent Research and Documentation Centre in Bosnia and Herzegovina, led by Mirsad Tokača,³ investigated the death tolls in the Bosnian War and estimated the number of killed to be around 94 000.⁴ These victims belong to all national groups in Bosnia, with more than half, 59%, being soldiers. The total loss is estimated to be about 2% of the population (Magnusson 2006, p. 48).

Bystanders in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Local Research

The application of the bystander concept in Bosnia is problematic on different levels. For one, only scarce examples of research on this issue can be found, with local literature on the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina having mainly been driven by nationalist interpretation, in which the dichotomy victim-versus-perpetrator is oversimplified, runs along ethnic lines, and disregards any bystanders.

On the Bosniak side, authors mainly characterize the war as a case of aggression against an internationally recognized state, which resulted in genocide against the Bosniaks. The aggressors are always identified as the nationalist militia from Serbia and elements of the Yugoslav army, working in alliance with local Serbs (Burg & Shoup 1999, p. 194). Following this premise, Smail Čekić, for example, has documented in great detail the preparations by the SDS and the Yugoslav People's Army (Jugoslavenska narodna armija, JNA) for war in Bosnia, ranging from arming the Serbian civilian population to relocating military depots. He concludes that the conflict in Bosnia and Herzegovina during the 1990s was the result of Serbian aggression, in which a carefully planned and well-organized genocide was committed against the Bosniaks (Čekić 1994). Mustafa Imamović, a professor of national history at the Faculty of law in Sarajevo, gave the definition of genocide committed by Serbs against Muslims/Bosniaks an even more historical and enduring character, by stating that the extermination of Muslims/Bosniaks by Serbs has been going on for centuries, and has been repeated several times. According to this account, the war in the 1990s represents the 9th genocide against Bosnian Muslims (Imamović 1997, p. 18). Thus, Serbian aggression, coupled with genocide, and not a civil war, are the defining themes of the Bosniak narrative.

By contrast, the Serbian interpretation and writing on the war is built on the argument that, since Ottoman times, Serbs have been victims of genocide commit-

³ http://www.norveska.ba/ARKIV/Ongoing_Projects/6CFD9857_BDFA_402B_8CF2_45E9803E08B5/#.Upivkv2x7IU, 20/11, 2012.

⁴ These numbers were given by Mirsad Tokača in his last interview for the Bosnian weekly magazine *Dani* nr. 524, June 2007.

ted by Muslims/Bosniaks. Regarding the war in the 1990s, Serbs were merely protecting their national rights in order to prevent another genocide against them, and Serbia became a victim of NATO and “terrorist attacks” in Kosovo (Drakulić 2003, p. 10).

A similar style of narration is found in Croatian nationalist writings, arguing that the Croats were the greatest victims of atrocities committed by Serbs, again emphasizing that the war in Croatia was a result of Serbian aggression.

As a consequence, each ethnic group perceives itself as a victim of the war, creating a strategy of victimization. This ideologically distorted view has to be understood in the framework of the still on-going process of nation- and state-building. Moreover, the charge of genocide often implies demands that the alleged perpetrator be punished not only for the alleged acts of genocide, but for all actions surrounding the genocide, where this depiction of events is instrumentalized to obscure one’s own atrocities. In addition, as Kecmanović notes, the practice of perceiving oneself as a victim provides the group with the moral and material right to reprisal, and promises to be the first one to be offered assistance (Kecmanović 2002, p. 54). Bosniak politicians and intellectuals especially tend to employ the discourse of victims of genocide in order, one could argue, to legitimize the creation of a Bosniak nation state.

Consequently, research that still serves nationalist ideologies and nation-state aspirations provides little room for the concept of bystander, creating a historiography that still adheres to already obsolete methods of simply registering events, where innovative concepts like bystander seem to be unknown and foreign.

Western Media, Academia, and Justice: Bystanders as Messengers, the Policy Makers, and Serbia

Solid and independent research on bystanders in Bosnia and Herzegovina has so far not been conducted, and the scarce literature in which bystanders are mentioned does often not qualify as research. The first references to bystanders in the Bosnian War derive from bystanders themselves, i.e. international journalists who were reporting from and about war zones in the country during the 1990s. With the intention to bring dire news of the War to the outside world, Western journalists entered the war zone as direct observers of the events on the ground. Their mere physical presence made them, one could argue, take over the role of professional bystanders as messengers, as described by Hilberg (Hilberg 1992, p. 217-224). In their bystander-by-assignment-behaviour, the journalists’ main attempt was to deliver information about the atrocities to the “distant” world, i.e. mainly the Western world. Without the ability to halt the violence that was the subject of their reporting, journalists very quickly pointed to Western governments and accused them of being

passive bystanders to the War. However, blaming someone for being a bystander automatically implies ascribing a character of genocide to the reported events, since the discourse about bystanders is related to genocide. It was exactly this logic that determined the style of narrative that was soon adopted.

One of the pioneering journalists who began to inform the U.S. media in this manner was Pulitzer Prize winner Roy Gutman. The content of his articles, which were published in the American newspapers *New York Newsday* and the *Washington Post*, focused mainly on the events in north-western Bosnia in the spring and summer of 1992. Being praised for having discovered the existence of Serb-held detention camps, Roy Gutman very soon found a motif, which was to act as a makeshift for a portrait of genocide, and making himself and the Western world a witness to this event. Articles, which he published in a compendium called "Witness to genocide" (Gutman 1993), were mainly determined by subjectively limited impressions and stories of former Muslim inmates from the Prijedor region, who reported about horrifying killings, rapes and torture. Raising the self-representation of survivors to the level of evidence, and giving voice only to one ethnic group of victims, soon resulted in an over-simplified picture, in which Serbs were the perpetrators carrying out genocide against Muslims/Bosniaks. Moreover, showing images of emaciated men, and deportations by train from Bosnia, invoked a clear parallel to the Holocaust and Auschwitz. The analogy with Nazi Germany immanently carried a clear message to Western policy makers: you have inflicted evil upon yourselves by remaining passive bystanders! Your intervention to prevent genocide is needed! (Gutman 1993, pp. 42-44).

Thus, by going beyond the role of a mere empathizing outsider, Gutman turned into a subjective transmitter of controlled information serving only one side, i.e. the Muslims/Bosniaks. In other words, the initial course of defining bystanders very soon turned to an instrumentalized tool for disseminating only a certain impression of the war, and suppressing others. Moreover, the emotional nature of the Western journalists' attachment to the Muslim cause led some journalists to vigorously dispute interpretations and reports inconsistent with the story line that followed the Muslim strategy of victimization (Gutman 1993, p. 38).

Moreover, in taking advantage of new media possibilities in the age of television, filmed interviews appeared again focusing on Muslims/Bosniaks being expelled from their homes, while Serbs were portrayed as the aggressors. As a result of this media climate, a static view of the war was created, with a tight and invariable angle of interpretation showing a certain group as the victim, while the others were the perpetrators.

Burg and Shoup have argued that most of the journalists were actually lacking the necessary training to understand the events. Therefore, as they correctly empha-

size, Western media fell largely prey to manipulation mainly of the Bosnian government, and became the messengers of a one-sided delineation of the events (Gowing 1994, p. 42). Thus, the close, yet external bystander role turned into a communication device that repeatedly accused the UN and Western policy makers of failing to end the genocide taking place in Bosnia.

The message of the bystanders-mediators reporting from the war zones was thus clear, identifying the Western world, especially Western policy makers, as passive witnesses of genocide, and the reports alleged that the perpetrators were caught *in delicto flagrante*.

Interestingly, as Nick Gowing suggests, the United States and the UN, among others, knew of the existence of the camps as early as June, and policy makers at higher levels were apparently engaged in heated internal debates about how to act on this information (Gowing 1994, p. 26). The detention camps were incorporated into the reports of humanitarian organizations, and the findings of the Special Rapporteur of the UN Commission on Human Rights, Tadeusz Mazowiecki, suggested concentration of the Serbian heavy weapons, disarmament of irregulars, and broadening of the UN mandate.⁵ Those steps, however, were never taken.

The bystander-mediator discourse between international journalists within the war zones was an attempt to create the awareness of the West's passive behaviour as bystanders, however, it hardly succeeded in mobilizing the West. Moreover, the discourse even failed to generate popular enthusiasm for involvement. In his research about popular perception of the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Nick Gowing concludes that the U.S. public, although concerned about Bosnia and supportive of ending ethnic cleansing and the war, did not support any direct involvement of U.S. ground forces (Gowing 1994, p. 38). On the contrary, the public opposed the use of air strikes against the Serbs throughout the spring of 1993 (Burg & Shoup 1999, p. 163). According to the study of the "Mirror Center for the People and the Press", published in November 1993, the American public did not even view the War in Bosnia as a matter of high priority for the United States. It was ranked well behind "strengthening the domestic economy", "stopping the flood of illegal aliens", protecting the global environment, and other issues that were regarded as more important (cited in Burg & Shoup 1999, p. 163). While the media coverage of the developments in Bosnia placed great pressure on Western policy makers to act, the popular opinion was not affected. A similar failure of the media to influence policy makers has been documented by Gowing. Indeed, his interviews with individuals responsible for U.S. foreign policy in 1992 underscore the fact that govern-

⁵ "Human Rights Situation and Reports of the Special Reporters and Representatives: Situation of Human Rights on the Territory of the Former Yugoslavia", UN General Assembly and Security Council document, A/47/666-S/24809 (November 17, 1992), p. 38.

ment intelligence sources in fact did provide policy makers with information about unseen developments long before the media (Gowing 1994, p. 54). This information, however, was deemed to be insufficient to motivate any intervention, despite the subsequent efforts of the media. Similar studies about European public opinion with regards to the war in Bosnia have not been conducted so far. Thus, analysing similarities and differences between the two Western public spheres still remains a task of future research.

As the analysis of R. Kuusisto has shown, in contrast to the media coverage, which employed the discourse of genocide, the political debate in the West diagnosed the events in Bosnia and Herzegovina as irrational, bewildered, and senseless. The discursive way of framing and associating the Bosnian war with metaphors of nightmares, natural catastrophes, and morasses, created a logical justification for a foreign policy by which no involvement was advisable or even possible. In a conflict driven by irrational acts, as was often stated, the best behaviour was to be a passive bystander, or an onlooker. Any intervention, according to the rationale of Bosnian metaphors, would resemble Quixotic behaviour of tilting at windmills, shadows and ghosts (Kuusisto 1998). Explaining that “[...] it is inter-ethnic conflict, it is massively mixed up [...] It is going to take time. And that is tragic, and it is horrible [...] It is difficult to explain, but this war is irrational. There is no rationality at all about ethnic conflict” (Eagleburger, 28 August 1992, cited in Kuusisto 1998, p. 610). The political discourse repeatedly asserted that delivering humanitarian aid, controlling no-fly zones, and offering negotiation opportunities without intervention was a viable plan for a third party to adopt in Bosnia (Kuusisto 1998, p. 611).

In short, the two main discourses in relation to the bystander role during the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina were presented in non-academic settings, and stood in direct conflict to each other. While the media discourse coming from the war zones accused the passive bystander behaviour of the Western powers of immorality, and lack of responsibility towards Muslim civilians being victims of genocide, the Western political discourse taking place outside the war zones considered the passive standing-by-behaviour as the only option in a war defined by irrationality. Both discourses and analysis identified the bystanders outside Bosnia and Herzegovina. Thus, employing Staub’s classification, both concentrated on external bystanders, which they identified on the state-level with Western policy makers and the U.S. Given the fact that Kuusisto’s analysis focuses on the political discourse during 1992, i.e. before U.S. policy intervened militarily, no discussion of bystanders is given in relation to changes in the War’s dynamics.

As far as international scholars are concerned, none have explicitly considered the role of bystanders in the context of the Bosnian War as comprehensively as in the Holocaust literature. Since many works have been written on the conflict in

Bosnia, one has to differentiate qualitatively the research that has been done so far. Many U.S. scholars, like Norman Cigar or Beverly Allen, following the same logic as the journalists, have been pointing to the U.S. government, especially the Clinton administration and Western Europe, as passive bystanders that failed to realize their potential to halt an on-going genocide (Allen 1996). Those scholars tend to reduce the complexity to a simple dichotomy characterized by Muslim victims and Serbian perpetrators. Explanations of bystander behaviour are not given. Furthermore, no explanation is intended to be given, since the bystander issue appears in those works only as a subject of strong condemnation.

Many American scholars identify the Western powers, i.e. Western Europe and USA, as passive bystanders. Following the premise that bystanders possess the potential to halt genocide, scholars have mainly employed a rhetoric of accusation, blaming the Western powers for having allowed the atrocities to happen in Bosnia and Herzegovina, which they in turn identify as genocide as a whole. Therefore, the awareness of bystander existence, again, seems to appear only within the discourse which qualifies the atrocities in Bosnia as genocide and frames the events with a linguistic practice known from the Holocaust narratives. It follows that the dimension of civil war and ethnic cleansing, as well as the Croatian component, are excluded. Consequently, the monovocal delineation of Serbs as perpetrators and Muslims/Bosniaks as victims, marginalizing the Croats, is often reproduced with the same writing patterns as local scholarship.

By contrast, European scholars, although not explicitly using bystander concepts, discuss the role of the bystander behaviour of Western powers in a more differentiated way, depicting a more gradual development of their involvement in the war. Xavier Bougarel, for example, criticizes the oversimplified identification of Western powers as passive bystanders. He draws attention to the gradual involvement of the Western powers especially after the summer of 1995, when the dynamics of the War accelerated rapidly (Bougarel 2004, p. 111). Moreover, he makes the reader aware of the very broad definition of the 'international community', which included not only policy makers, but also many non-governmental organizations, NATO, the UN, which, in varying degrees, were involved in Bosnia and Herzegovina. This, as Bougarel states, determined the rhythm of the War in Bosnia (Bougarel 2004, p. 39). As he argues, the successive peace plans were shaping the internal configuration of the conflict. Massive humanitarian support, for example, the positioning of UNPROFOR in war zones, as well as the proclamation of no-fly zones, definitely provided the population with the ability to survive and take refuge in the proclaimed enclaves. Massive air attacks in September 1995, which were provoked by the Srebrenica massacre in July of the same year, accelerated the crisis in the Republic of Srpska. Additional intervention in the form of economic sanctions ap-

plied to Serbia and Montenegro, as did a weapons embargo, although often achieving contrary outcomes, are seen by the author as examples that are inconsistent with the previously mentioned accusations. However, Bougarel agrees that more could have been done, but explains the ineffectiveness of Western policy mainly by the unintended consequences of their negotiations resulting from the gap between the perceptions of the conflicting parties and the Western politicians (Bougarel 2004, p. 42).

Burg and Shoup have adopted a more critical view towards the international community, which they mainly define as bystanders who provided outside intervention, but still did not do enough to halt the conflict. Like Bougarel, the authors differentiate between governmental (in)action, organizations, peace-keeping troops, etc. While they acknowledge an active role by the U.S. government, they criticise that the intervention was not backed by any military force (Burg & Shoup 1999, p. 200). Without necessarily providing an explanation for this passivity, which the authors ascribe mainly to the U.S. government, Burg and Shoup cite some U.S. policy makers, who in their statements were illuminating enough. Hutchings' comment, which they quote, points to the essence of the American reasoning:

[Policy makers] never decided whether important U.S. interests were at stake. We never decided whether Yugoslavia mattered enough to invest considerable American leadership and, if need be, to place substantial numbers of American men and women in harm's way to halt or at least contain the conflict. (Hutchings 1997, p. 320)

That the disputes about intervention were, again, determined by the definition of the events, is evident from the fact that those who viewed the crisis in the former Yugoslavia as a civil war, as did the Secretary of Defense, argued that it did not threaten international peace, or require Western intervention. Those who came to see the conflict as a case of aggression by Serbia against a sovereign state (Bosnia-Herzegovina), as did the Secretary of State, eventually pressed for more direct involvement.

However, a "growing sense" among some of the administration was that George W. Bush, who was then president, might suffer "political damage" in the upcoming elections if the administration failed to act. By citing those arguments, the authors make clear that the motivation to give up a passive onlooker role was provided mainly by the self-interest of the U.S. government.

Identifying somebody as a bystander-onlooker implies also declaring the same person, government, or state, as being capable of intervening in, or halting an ongoing genocide. Interestingly, the radius of bystanders in the literature has been mainly restricted to the Western countries, endowing only them with the possibility

to react. The Arab World and the East, as far as I know, have never been put in this context.

With regards to the only local case, Srebrenica, which has been classified by the ICTY as genocide, the role of bystander was again assigned to an external group, namely the UN. Being declared a “safe area”, UN troops were obliged to effectively guarantee “peace and security” of the civilians. A growing literature on this event (see e.g. Delpla, Bougarel & Fournel 2012) has repeatedly criticised the behaviour of the UN Dutch troops, and especially the Dutch Defence Minister Jorke Voorhoeve and UN top envoy Yasushi Akashi, who let the Serbs enter Srebrenica, which in turn resulted in a tragedy. Thus, as Vetlesen argues, those bystanders, by assignment due to their professional and principled non-involvement, which is otherwise viewed as highly meritorious, provided the Serb soldiers with the opportunity to commit the massacre (Vetlesen 2000).

An alternative definition of bystander in the Srebrenica case is given by the Bosnian general Sefer Halilović, who has accused the Bosnian government in Sarajevo of remaining passive and letting innocent people get killed (Halilović 2005). His main explanation as to why the Bosnian government did not react to halt the massacre and left Srebrenica in Serbian hands, was the goal to exchange this region for Serbian parts of Sarajevo (Halilović 2005, p. 257). In 1996, women from Srebrenica angrily protested in the streets of Tuzla, condemning Naser Orić, the Muslim general in Srebrenica at the time of the massacre, for having failed to protect them.⁶ In July 2003, a heated polemic between Halilović, who accused Alija Izetbegović for being a passive bystander (although he never used this terminology), and Izetbegović himself, took place in the newspaper “Oslobođenje”.⁷

To attribute to somebody the failure to prevent genocide makes the accused vulnerable in front of the court, since such failure, in legal terms, entails punishment. Regarding the judicial perspective in the Srebrenica case, the Hague Tribunal released its definition of the “passive bystander” on February 26, 2007. In its judgement, the ICTY argued that, although not involved in the realisation of genocide, Serbia had violated its obligation under the Genocide Convention to prevent genocide in Srebrenica. It states the following:

In view of their undeniable influence and of the information, voicing serious concern, in their possession, the Yugoslav federal authorities should, in the view of the Court, have made the best efforts within their power to try and prevent the tragic events then taking shape, whose scale, though it could not have been foreseen with certainty, might at least have been surmised. The FRY leadership, and

⁶ *Oslobođenje*, 24-29 August 1996, p. 3.

⁷ *Oslobođenje*, 11 July 2003, p. 4.

President Milošević above all, were fully aware of the climate of deep-seated hatred which reigned between the Bosnian Serbs and the Muslims in the Srebrenica region. Yet the Respondent has not shown that it took any initiative to prevent what happened, or any action on its part to avert the atrocities which were committed. It must therefore be concluded that the organs of the Respondent did nothing to prevent the Srebrenica massacres, claiming that they were powerless to do so, which hardly tallies with their known influence over the VRS. As indicated above, for a State to be held responsible for breaching its obligation of prevention, it does not need to be proven that the State concerned definitely had the power to prevent the genocide; it is sufficient that it had the means to do so and that it manifestly refrained from using them. Such is the case here. In view of the foregoing, the Court concludes that the Respondent violated its obligation to prevent the Srebrenica genocide in such a manner as to engage its international responsibility.⁸

Here, the focus is put on the state level, which is emphasized in Article I of the Genocide convention that served as a basis for the judgement. Thus, the failure to take all the measures to prevent genocide, which are within the state's power and which might have contributed to preventing genocide, is seen as a crime itself, albeit not as punishable.

If we follow the logic of research, which has been undertaken so far and which, to a certain extent, has been accusing Western governments and the US, as well as the UN and the Bosnian government dominated by Muslims/Bosniaks for failing to prevent genocide, then all of them would sooner or later have to be in the dock.

Further research has to be conducted with more revealing documents that might give insight into who really was a bystander, and who had the actual ability to halt the massacre.

A look at different discourses in the media, academia, and legal documents reveals that, in context of the Bosnian conflict, the category "bystander" has been mainly discussed in terms of external bystanders as onlookers. In most of the cases it was (Western European/U.S.) states and their governments, which were framed as bystanders-onlookers. We may conclude that awareness of (external) bystanders has not been articulated on a very sophisticated level. Moreover, as the Western media coverage has shown, it often was a product of controlled information employed for victimization strategies used by the Bosniak side. Explanatory models for bystander behaviour among identified instances have been scarce, and mostly focus on self-interest. All those factors call for a more detailed examination of external bystander behaviour, where a more 'situational' approach with evolving patterns might be employed, rather than a static identification that does not take into

⁸ <http://www.icj-cij.org/doCKET/index.php?pr=1897&code=bhy&p1=3&p2=1&p3=6&case=91&k=f4,29/11/2012>.

account any specific constellation, or their progressing character. Moreover, given the fact that only Srebrenica has been defined as genocide, the question remains as to what extent bystander behaviour is applicable in the case of the Bosnian war as a whole.

In the next section I will try to explain why it is difficult, if not impossible, to apply the concept of internal bystander as onlooker, as has been done in the case of the Holocaust.

Bystanders in the Bosnian Conflict?

As already noted, the bystander issue derives mainly from the scholarly literature on the Holocaust. It has been emphasized that the Nazi propaganda's primary function was not to incite violence, but to pacify in-group members and accommodate them to the new system of exclusion and persecution of Jews (Dulić 2005, p. 32). With the creation of a narrative that labelled the Jews "objective enemies" of society, and thus endowed them with the role of a scapegoat, society was to be made receptive of a reality of collectivist exclusion of the Jews. "Ordinary people", in-group members not involved in the perpetration of violence, were expected to perpetuate their "ordinary" social practices on the quotidian level in their already embodied social roles. The reorganization of the framework of reality, which made the extermination of Jews necessary, was to be experienced as norm-given and should not disturb the continuity of everyday life. Consequently, the process of destruction was integrated into a quasi-normal and peaceful everyday life, embodied by already habituated social actions, which expected the individual to become a passive bystander, onlooker, not reacting to the destructive processes going on at the same time.

By contrast, the Bosnian war was an example of armed combat, which raises the crucial question about the existence of internal bystanders. It was shaped by ethnic mobilization and conflict in which all three ethnic groups of the country participated. After the first shot in Sarajevo, and the barricades along the streets, the normative framework abruptly changed and was reset into an unexpected context of violence. The public political and social landscape was no longer offering the normality, in which anyone could have perpetuated quotidian habits. As Dušan Kecmanović, a Serbian psychiatrist and former professor at the Faculty of Medicine in Sarajevo observes, the political landscape of a once peaceful multinational and multi-confessional Bosnia and Herzegovina changed into a public space of violence, where ethnic affiliation and nationalist passions became the crucial determinant of identity formation and perception of others among all three groups, the Serbs, Croats and Muslims/Bosniaks (Kecmanović, 2002). As soon as nationalist parties introduced the cultural grammar of nationalism, which began to dictate the

narratives, the new reality started to provide civilians with new identities, regardless of their willingness to accept it or not. Thus, people who once defined themselves through their profession or class affiliation were forced to become members of the Serb, Croat or Bosniak people, based on their names or religious affiliation. In other words, according to the logic of ethnic times, a Serb in Sarajevo, who might not have shared anything but his ethnic affiliation with the Serb soldiers who were bombing the city, was considered as and equated to the Serb aggressors. This violent imposition of ethnic identities on people served to involve them in the armed conflict and made them enact ethnic roles. Therefore, no continuity of the former realities of a multicultural Bosnia was intended to be preserved, but a discontinuity was to be established, according to which people should quit with the past. The imposition of ethnic identity, which one might not even perceive as one's own, in this new context of violence, made it hard to continue a civilian life and remain aside to what happened. The only form of accommodation to the newly defined framework of norms was the acceptance of ethnic identity, which was especially hard for people of mixed ethnic affiliations, or who had a partner who belonged to a different ethnic group. These people were left without any alternative but to escape the areas affected by the conflict. In fact, they were often the first to do so. How people dealt with those new realities will be shown below.

This abrupt change of reality and situation was not prepared by propaganda, neither did it serve to make people continue their old social practices, since those were mostly based on inter-ethnic acceptance. The change was rather to mobilize people for action in ethnic terms, rather than to pacify them.

Consequently, no space was left for internal members of society to remain passive witnesses, with a standing-by-behaviour defined as onlookers. After the arrival of ethnic times and the change of the political landscape, people were drawn into new social frames, where they could not escape their ethnic affiliation as their primary identity.

The fact that the imposition of nationalism in Bosnia and Herzegovina came abruptly and without previous propaganda highlights the role of the media, which will be discussed in the next section.

Media in Bosnia and Herzegovina

Ervin Staub has emphasized the evolutionary aspect of the pacification process during the Holocaust. According to his work, psychological possibilities to remain passive to human sufferings result from a developmental process along the psychological continuum of destruction (Staub 1989b, p. 91). Here, ideology and propaganda have been identified as the main tools that served the amalgamation of new utopian views, and the acceptance of a new hierarchy of social order. This also explains the

crucial role of the media as a medium for establishing a parasitic attitude towards the atrocities, and without the necessity to feel any responsibility to act.

As far as the War in Bosnia and Herzegovina is concerned, there were different methods of pacifying the local population. With regards to the media in Bosnia, Mark Thompson has analysed the change of their discourse. He alerts to the fact that no ideological submissiveness to nationalism was evident or shown prior to the War in Bosnia. Thus, no nationalist propaganda was spread through the media, and no attempts to pacify were made. In fact, during the transition to a multiparty government and the run-down to war, Bosnian media, like the daily "Oslobodenje", or the TVSA (Television Sarajevo), were trying to retain anti-nationalist attitudes despite initial attempts by the Serb nationalist party SDS to split the media along national lines. As Thompson concludes, this was not so much a result of independent-minded journalists, but a consequence of the government's inability to subjugate the media to its control. Moreover, nationalist sectarianism was increasingly opposed by the largest Muslim party, Party of Democratic Action (Stranka demokratske akcije, SDA) since its overriding goal was to preserve the republic (Thompson 1999, p. 263). Also, as armed conflict erupted in Kosovo, Slovenia and Croatia, the Bosnian way of reporting was characterized by impartiality.

Even after the break-out of violence in Bosnia, the media continued to employ a vague vocabulary that was more mystifying than revealing of the nature of the conflict. The reasons for this interpretation of the events, which were going on in Croatia, and later even in Bosnia itself, are manifold. Fear was one of them. As the Radio-television Bosnia and Herzegovina (RTVBH) radio journalist, Rade Trbojević, a Serb by nationality, stated, proclaiming the JNA attack on Sarajevo might have resulted in the realisation of threats that were already posed to journalists by Serbian nationalist politicians in the form of individual harassment and intimidation (Thompson 1999, p. 215). However, this is not enough to explain the reasons for the unusual media behaviour. The psychological factor and the belief that JNA could never turn against Bosnia, regardless of what it might have done in Croatia, and that the outside world would never let a general war happen, was widespread in Bosnia, including among journalists (Thompson 1999, p. 230). In the same vein, Miloš Vasić from the Serbian weekly "Vreme" wrote that "the possibility of a war in Bosnia and Herzegovina was so appalling to everyone that it bordered on the unthinkable, like a global thermonuclear war, from a Yugoslav standpoint" (Vasić, Miloš. *Balkan War Report*, Jan 1993, cited in Thompson 1999, p. 230). A professional factor was also given by the fact that the media were staffed with ideological journalists, who were used to working for a totalitarian regime that provided a pro-Yugoslav and pro-JNA ideological framework. All those factors resulted finally in an RTVBH's effect on its audience, which was precisely the

opposite of TV Belgrade and TV Zagreb on theirs, in that it disarmed them psychologically.

As the war progressed, and Bosnia came to be divided into several ethnically dominated regions, nationalist media were set up alongside the parallel autonomous territories. Journalists who were not willing to subvert to nationalist discourse at first were forced to do so. If not, individual harassment or intimidation was to follow. One victim of this new policy was TV journalist Ljubomir Ljubojević, a Serb by nationality. After criticizing the (Bosnian) government, he was forced to join the Bosnian Army. In his effort to escape from Sarajevo, he was caught by Serb troops, who took him to Pale and forced him on Kanal S (a Serbian newly introduced channel) to “rehabilitate” himself for having served “Muslim television” (Thompson 1999, p. 216).

On April 8th, 1992, after the independence of the “republic” was proclaimed by its leadership under Karadžić, Srpska Republika BiH Novinska Agencija SRNA (Serb Republic News Agency) was established as the news agency of the Serb Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Its character was very similar to the TV programme broadcast in Serbia based on the hallmarks of disinformation and close collaboration with Serb media. Their stories, which were often contradictory and aggressive, frequently employed manipulative techniques, giving distorted pictures of the events in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

The Croat equivalent of SRNA and Kanal S were Herceg-bosanska Novinska Agencija, HABENA (the Herceg-Bosna News Agency) and TV Široki Brijeg. HABENA was founded on August 28, 1993, after the proclamation of the “Herceg-Bosna republic”. Following similar patterns as the Serb nationalist media, the reports manipulated the tragedy of Bosnian Croats for Croatian television, ranting against mujahedin and Islamic fanatics (Thompson 1999, p. 262).

Although the media content started to split apart and adopted nationalist views that were often forced upon journalists, it is still a matter of research as to what extent these nationalist media had an influence on the local population. No study has been done on the media’s direct impact on peoples’ behaviour during the war. Although Roy Gutman has argued that the local Serbian population in Eastern Bosnia, who were running the detention camps, accused the inmates of the same offences that the Serb media was broadcasting, it remains a question as to what extent this was an internalized attitude (Gutman 1993, p. 123). In order to grasp the impact of media propaganda on the population, further studies employing more anthropological methods will have to be done. Given the fact that the media breakdown left several parts of Bosnia isolated without any information supply, the consumption of the media was restricted to casual information/propaganda. In addition, most of the local population, which had to witness killings of their neighbours, stood by

because of threats, rather than being convinced by the propaganda. Therefore, in the case of the Bosnian War, it seems very vague to explain standing-by behaviour through media influence and propaganda.

The opinion-making elites in Bosnia and Herzegovina served an aim opposed to the nationalist discourse, which the new political elite tried to implement. Thus, no propaganda previous to the armed conflict was broadcast in order to prepare people for war, or even to pacify them. The advent of ethnic times, instead, came abruptly without previous social engineering and collectivist exclusion.

The Security Dilemma and Imposed Bystander Behaviour

It has already been stated that passive bystanders as onlookers, as described in the Holocaust literature, are difficult to find in an armed conflict where all groups are involved as combatants. However, in some reports about the Bosnian war and repetitive situations, which are often cited in the secondary literature, a pattern seems to exist among the local population, which could be discerned as bystander behaviour, albeit crucially different from ideologically driven or freely negotiated passivity.

In war reports, it is often emphasized that the local population was not, as a rule, eager to be part of the ethnic cleansing. The accelerated nationalisation and polarization of Bosnia was initially dismissed by the locals, who often refused to accommodate the policy of ethnic cleansing. However, what locals still did was to passively witness actions of ethnic cleansing, which were most often committed by external military forces (Calic 1996, p. 121-130).

In fact, in order to achieve the passive observer-behaviour among the local population, various stratagems were used. Most often in order to establish anti-Bosniak/Croatian/Serb attitudes, campaigns were initiated by the organizers of ethnic cleansing operations, usually by playing on fear. Information/propaganda alleging that members of the other ethnic groups would initiate ethnic cleansing of Bosniaks/Croats/Serbs, if the addressed group did not act first, was often spread. This mobilization technique, which enforced a situation of a so-called security dilemma⁹ was the most powerful and frequent tool to motivate the local population to close ranks against its former neighbours and to stay passive bystanders to the proceeding cleansing.

⁹ The security dilemma has been used as an explanatory model for conflict situations mainly on the international state level. Its main assumption is that states, but also individuals, act violently towards one another out of uncertainty about the other's intention. Thus as e.g. individuals can find themselves in a situation of kill first (or in this case let be killed) or run the risk of being killed. For an illuminating explanation of the security dilemma on the intrastate level, see Roe 1999.

One example that illustrates the security dilemma is the account of ethnic cleansing committed by Muslims/Bosniaks, as presented by Ejub Štitkovic. He recounts how the story of the murder of a farmer's wife by Muslims/Bosniaks was spread far and wide in the area around Bihać, in order to turn the Serbian population against the Muslims/Bosniaks. The instigators of ethnic cleansing, however, were most often outsiders to the cities and towns about to be cleansed, and often included warriors from Serbia (Štitkovic & Udovički 1997, p. 181). Thus, although not driven into the destruction process, the local population acted out of imposed anguish and did therefore not oppose the killings of innocent people. By spreading misinformation, which portrayed other ethnic groups as potential killers, locals were trapped into the logic of "kill first, or in this case let being killed, or run the risk of being killed".

Another illuminating example is given by the American journalist Peter Maass, who interviewed two Serbian women. When asked why the Muslims/Bosniaks in Banja Luka were arrested, the women answered:

Because they were planning to take over the city. They had already drawn up lists... Thank God they were arrested first. (cited in Vetlesen 2000, p. 527)

Running the risk of being killed did not only mean 'by other ethnic groups', but very soon included the risk of being killed by the perpetrators of one's own ethnic group. In Bijeljina, for example, a number of local Serbs tried to halt a massacre committed by Arkan's forces, and, according to Bosnian sources, were killed by Arkan's men (Burg & Shoup 1999, p. 129).

Thus, often no ideologically prepared parasitism was connected to the bystanders' behaviour, but instead the fear induced by the uncertainty about the intentions of neighbours or paramilitary soldiers were the reasons for the local population to remain passive to the atrocities that were committed against neighbours of different ethnic affiliation. Staying passive was therefore a form of self-defence.

Another modality of creating bystander roles and imposing them on the local population has been reported in the Mazowiecki report in the context of rapes that were taking place. Regarding several patterns of ethnic cleansing, the report notes:

Rape has been used as one method to terrorize civilian populations in villages and forcing ethnic groups to leave. [...] The Serb paramilitary units would enter a village. Several women would be raped in the presence of the others and that word spread throughout the village and a climate of fear was created. Several days later, Yugoslav People's Army (JNA) officers would arrive at the village offering permission to the non-Serb population to leave the village.¹⁰

¹⁰ Mazowiecki report, January 1993, see <http://www.haverford.edu/relg/sells/reports/mazowiecki.html>, 20/11/2012.

In a situation like this, the role of a bystander was not the result of a free choice motivated by whatever reason (ideological, career, etc.), but rather imposed by the perpetrators. The policy of bystander identity imposition appeared in conjunction with the effort to displace a targeted ethnic group from the region. The compulsion to be a witness of a crime and to stand by did not serve to make people accustomed to a continuum of atrocities, but to alarm and mobilize them (Staub 1989b, p. 91). In this context of abnormality, without a pluralism of available social roles, people were forced into the role of a “close bystander”, becoming proximal witnesses of atrocities. Any possibilities to act in a different way than to observe the occurrences were excluded.

As Maja Povrzanović states, in such a context of wartime, politics of identity are not based on choice, but in the absence of choice, they are not based on strategies of negotiation, but primarily on strategies of physical survival (Povrzanović 1997). Actually, those “bystanders” were simultaneously victims who suffered traumas in their role of forced onlookers.

Thus, in the context of the conflict in Bosnia, the “passive” local population was often left without any alternative to act. And even if one risked acting as a rescuer, one often ended up becoming a victim as well. Thus, no categories of the so far explored bystander context might be applicable to this context of internal bystander-behaviour. Perhaps one might think about a category of “coerced/forced bystander”, or “imposition of bystander-behaviour”. This, however, remains a task of further research. In addition, a more analytical ethnographic work might help understanding the dynamics of this situational type of bystander behaviour. By approaching the issue on an individual level, rather than reporting it only in terms of military strategies or patterns, a better psychological insight into this behaviour could be provided.

Bystanders Rescuers

How individuals resisted the enforced nationalistic logic of reality and the fact that some people did indeed help each other independently of their ethnic and religious affiliation has already been documented in several works. Mainly anthropological research¹¹ on the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina, as well as some personal accounts by “ordinary people” collected and published by Svjetlana Broz, the granddaughter of Josip Broz Tito, have documented the will to help others despite the risk one was taking. Most of the published accounts are personal stories told by individuals, either

¹¹ One of the most illuminating works is Maček’s dissertation about everyday life of Sarajevans under siege, who according to the author’s observations did resist nationalism by helping each other independent from their ethnic or religious affiliation (Maček 2000).

in interviews, diaries or autobiographic works. Thus, the available information about people who rescued others is not research, but subjective accounts. Due to the fact that personal stories and memories are mostly recollections of single situations of small-scale help on the individual level, no “evolution of commitment to help along a continuum of benevolence” (Staub 1989a, p. 167) can be drawn.

Depending on the situation, individual rescuers are reported to be found among civilians, as well as soldiers. Dušan Kecmanović, for example, on the escape from Sarajevo through Croat-held Herceg-Bosna, reports his personal salvation by a Croatian soldier. Being Serb in a Croatian-dominated territory in ethnic times meant being equated with Chetniks and the enemy, which happened to Kecmanović. After interrogation by a Croatian policeman, Kecmanović escaped detention and probably even death with the help of a former student, who, in an open radio contact, heard that a Chetnik had been caught and the name of Kecmanović mentioned, and rushed into the headquarters to rescue his former professor (Kecmanović 2002, p. 28). It is disputable to what extent Kecmanović’s former student was actually a “bystander”, since he was also a Croatian soldier wearing a uniform and being involved in the conflict. However, it is clear that having the role of a Croatian soldier in ethnic times, in this specific situation, he bestowed greater commitment to the role of a rescuer inspired by the fact that it was his former professor. Other stories reveal individual soldiers helping civilians who were total strangers to them. Often the social background of these people is not mentioned. The personal motivation to aid people often remains a mystery. Moreover, due to very personal reports focusing only on individual experiences, it remains a question whether these rescuers were actually acting exclusively in the reported specific situation, or if this was only one example of a series of systematic rescue attempts.

Turning to the civilian rescuers, Svjetlana Broz has published a collection of personal, often very touching stories about brave individuals, often civilians opposed to nationalism, who aided people even at the expense of their own lives (Broz 1995). Again, those civilians who rescued others can hardly be labelled bystanders, since at the same time they were victims. Stories from Sarajevo under siege especially illuminate this. One person who has been mentioned in several stories from Sarajevo is the taxi driver, Mile Plakalović, a Serb by nationality. Being a taxi-driver he was well known among Sarajevans for his courage to drive injured people of all ethnic groups to the hospital for free. We can assume that Plakalović is an example of an individual with high moral standards, as bystanders rescuers in the Holocaust have been characterized, whose greatest commitment was to the role of a helper in different situations and contexts.

Anthropological literature, in which everyday life of “ordinary people” during the war has been documented, has also called attention to the aid that people were

giving each other independently of their nationality. It has been mainly presented in the context of taking care of neighbours. Anthropologists, therefore, have paid great attention to the neighbours and discovered an explanatory model for the helping behaviour in the so-called *komšilik*, a Turkish word for neighbourhood (Baškar 2007). As Bojan Baškar argues, *komšilik* derives from the Ottoman legacy, in which inter-religious tolerance is distinguished from other Imperial legacies. This practice was deeply inscribed, especially in Bosnia, where three religious groups were living next to each other for centuries (Baškar 2007, p. 2). This attitude found its way into the literature as a specific Bosnian habitus of multi-ethnic tolerance and peaceful cohabitation that allowed for the “simultaneity of both shared and separate places” (Bringa 1995, p. 18). The perpetuation of this reality of tolerance has been noticed by anthropologists in the War, and often served as a motive for people to oppose ethnic imperatives and help each other. Speaking in terms of symbolic interactionism, we can argue that in these cases, people felt greater commitment to the role of the neighbour than to an ethnically defined role (Stryker 1980). Preserving a good neighbourhood, which resulted in helping each other to survive, was also an attempt to preserve the multi-ethnic reality known from peaceful times. But, here again, the concept of bystander in its original form cannot be implied, since each of those people were also victims.

All of those stories are examples concerning people who were within the war and could be delineated as internal rescuers, although probably not bystanders as used in the Holocaust context. Regarding an external bystander who became involved in helping civilians, examples on organizational as well as individual levels appear in some literature, mostly documenting their efforts in collecting food and clothes and sending them into the war zones.

On the organizational level, we have already mentioned international humanitarian aid. Although these actions cannot be equated with the rescuing actions of people within the war, they are definitely a testimony to activities that cannot be defined as onlooking behaviour.

In conclusion, although no research has been done on the rescuing behaviour in the war, personal accounts show that there were individuals who extended the ethnic limitations by helping and rescuing people. Although they cannot be viewed as bystanders, in certain situations, the role of rescuer appeared to become more decisive. This behaviour is mostly reported on the individual level, however, and restricted to single situations, which hinders insight into the more evolutionary aspect of this type of behaviour. Regarding motives for rescue, one explanation has entered academic discourse, i.e. *komšilik*. All this calls for further attention by researchers to explore a new explanatory concept, which could explain courageous behaviour by individuals in the Bosnian War.

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