

Religion, Violence and Genocide: In Narratives of Survivors from the War in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

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Religion, Violence and Genocide: In Narratives of Survivors from the War in Bosnia and Herzegovina

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Abstract [en]

The starting point of this study is the war that took place in northwestern Bosnia and Herzegovina in the 1990s. Serbian soldiers and police targeted their use of violent force directly against the civilian populations in northwestern Bosnia. In their quest to expel Bosniacs and Croats from this area, Serbian soldiers and police used mass executions, forced flight, systematic rape, and concentration camps. The aim of this study is analyzing the narratives of survivors of the war in northwestern Bosnia. The focus lies on analyzing interviewees'™ description of war-time violence and also analyzing discursive patterns that contribute in constructing the phenomenon "war violence". Analysis shows that the interpersonal interactions that caused the violence continue even after the violent situation is over. Recollections from perpetrators and those subjected to violence of the war do not exist only as verbal constructions in Bosnia of today. Stories about violent situations live their own lives after the war and continue being important to individuals and social life. The crimes committed in northwestern Bosnia are qualified as genocide according to indictments against former Serbian leaders Radovan Karadžić and Ratko Mladić. All interviewees in this study experienced and survived the war in northwestern Bosnia. These individuals have

a present, ongoing relation with these communities: Some live there permanently, and some spend their summers in northwestern Bosnia. Institutions in the administrative entity Republika Srpska (to which northwestern Bosnia now belong administratively) deny genocide, and this approach to war-time events becomes a central theme in future, post-war analysis of the phenomena of war violence, and of reconciliation. Therefore, it is very important to analyze the political elite's denial of the systematic acts of violence during the war that have been conveyed by the Hague Tribunal, the Court of Bosnia and Herzegovina on War Crime, and Bosnian media. The narratives in my empirical material seem to be influenced by (or coherent with) the rhetoric mediated in these fora. When informants emphasize extermination and the systematization of violence during the war, they produce and reproduce the image of a mutual struggle on a collective level. The aim of this struggle seems to be that the described acts of violence be recognized as genocide.

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