

# **A Micro History of Prijedor: Interpreting Mass Violence as the Interplay of Context and Agency Through the Lens of Social Action Dynamics**



*Bosnian and Croatian prisoners of war detained at the Trnopolje concentration camp in Bosnia, 1992. Source: [Vice](#)*

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## **Abstract**

This thesis argues against macro structural explanations of the conflict in Bosnia and Herzegovina by focusing on mass violence directed against the non-Serb population of the Prijedor region. Through a multi-level analysis, it demonstrates the essentiality of context in episodes of mass violence. Using social action theory, it puts forward the argument that context largely shapes the available action alternatives that perpetrators might perceive, which in turns affects their decision making. On the micro level it presents agency as the deciding factor in the absence of structural norms such as obedience and duress, which would otherwise have had a considerable impact on the perpetrators' assessment of risks and incentives. The framework employed in this inquiry is based on recent interdisciplinary research in the field of conflict and genocide studies. To construct the argument, this thesis utilizes court documents from the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia on the basis of a qualitative factual analysis.

*Keywords:* Bosnia, Prijedor, perpetration of mass violence, action alternatives

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Dedicated to the memory of my grandfather, who lived for his family, friends, and duty, and now watches over us.

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## Introduction

In the night of 29 to 30 April, 1992, Bosnian Serb forces took control over the city of Prijedor located in northwestern Bosnia in an illegal coup d'état “without a single bullet fired.”<sup>1</sup> According to the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY), this coup had been planned and coordinated for months with the intention of creating a Serbian municipality which would eventually form a part of an envisioned ethnically pure Serbian state.<sup>2</sup> The region of Prijedor then became infamous especially because of its notoriously brutal concentration camps of Omarska, Keraterm, and Trnopolje, which were the product of an intentional policy of systematic ethnic cleansing of the non-Serb population.<sup>3</sup>

Soon the world got to know of the brutalities of the Omarska camp by means of images broadcasted on the international media, showing emaciated prisoners. The images resembled the horrors of Auschwitz. This was, however, Europe at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The raping, killing, and torture of prisoners that took place in these camps left people elsewhere speechless. For how was it possible that one human being was capable of inflicting pain onto another in such perversely imaginative ways that send shivers down the spines of most people? How did local individuals turn into perpetrators of mass violence against their neighbors? And how can we try to understand the development of the campaign of ethnic cleansing and systematic atrocities which took place in the municipality of Prijedor between May and August 1992? It is precisely these questions that this inquiry aims to answer. Naturally, however, it is never really possible for us to determine exactly why individuals act in a certain way or become perpetrators of violence. Therefore, the aim of this paper is to examine the structures of mass violence in the municipality of Prijedor, with emphasis put on violence as a type of action understood in the context of individual interactions with social expectations.<sup>4</sup> As such, this paper deals predominantly with the micro history of the region. A more thorough elaboration on the precise methods employed will be provided after a historiographical discussion of the topic.

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<sup>1</sup> Prosecutor v. Milimir Stakić, IT-97-24-T, Judgment, 16, 133 (ICTY, July 23, 2003), <http://www.icty.org/x/cases/stakic/acjug/en/sta-aj060322e.pdf>.

<sup>2</sup> The Prosecutor v. Momčilo Krajišnik and Biljana Plavšić, IT-00-39 & 40-PT, Factual Basis for Plea of Guilt, 2 (ICTY, September 30, 2002), <http://www.icty.org/x/cases/plavsic/custom4/en/plea.pdf>.

<sup>3</sup> Prosecutor v. Miroslav Kvočka, Dragoljub Prcać, Milojica Kos, Mlađo Radić and Zoran Žigić, IT-98-30/1-T, Judgment, 35-36 (ICTY, March 24, 2016), [http://www.icty.org/x/cases/karadzic/tjug/en/160324\\_judgement.pdf](http://www.icty.org/x/cases/karadzic/tjug/en/160324_judgement.pdf).

<sup>4</sup> Kjell Follingstad Anderson, *Perpetrating Genocide: A Criminological Account*, Routledge Studies in Genocide and Crimes against Humanity (Abingdon, Oxo ; New York, NY: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group, 2018), 8.

In the past, several overly simplistic narratives were relatively popular as explanations for the viciousness of the war in Bosnia.<sup>5</sup> On one side of the spectrum there was primordialism and ethnonationalism. In the case of the former, explanations were based on biological factors such as kinship and evolutionary psychology which served as explanations for conflict, whereas in the case of the latter it was the view that conflicts are inherently rooted in cultures.<sup>6</sup> In essence, those who agree with such narratives argue that antagonistic identities are so deeply rooted in society that a tribal interpretation is the proper way of analyzing conflicts.<sup>7</sup> In other words, these narratives ultimately deny the importance of agency in favor of profoundly structuralist explanations.<sup>8</sup> In reality, this often meant that a view was proposed which saw the conflict in Bosnia as a war fundamentally determined by the ethnic and religious identities of Bosnian Muslims, Croats, and Serbs, which in practice meant that no matter the scale of atrocities, the explanation was that this is simply the way these people act, that they are not Europeans, but basically savages, who murder one another because of centuries of hatred and ethnic grievances. Similar views were also used by policy makers to justify the United Nations' approach of non-interference during the earlier stages of the war, when General MacKenzie, stationed in Sarajevo as the commander of U.N. forces, became an advocate of the view that Bosnia is an irrational place where people just wanted to kill each other.<sup>9</sup> The reality was, however, quite different, and MacKenzie's inability to fully comprehend the scale of the mass violence in Bosnia might have been partly caused by the fact that during the first few months of the war, Sarajevo was one of the very few places where fragmented Bosnian troops were managing to hold the Serbs at bay. Elsewhere, a systematic full-scale policy of ethnic cleansing was being implemented.<sup>10</sup>

Nevertheless, this thesis rejects any claims which would see Serbs as inherently sadistic or more violent than other groups. Despite the fact that they were accountable for the majority of atrocities that took place in Bosnia, it was not the Serbs as an ethnic group who should in any way take the blame. It would be fundamentally incorrect to look for some sort of a collective responsibility for the actions of individual people, let alone assume that those who did commit

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<sup>5</sup> Steven Majstorovic, "Ancient Hatreds or Elite Manipulation? Memory and Politics in the Former Yugoslavia," *World Affairs*, Vol. 159, No. 4 (Spring 1997), 170-179.

<sup>6</sup> Paul Dixon, "Beyond Sectarianism in the Middle East? Comparative Perspectives on Group Conflict," in *Beyond Sunni and Shia: The Roots of Sectarianism in a Changing Middle East*, 1st ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), 14.

<sup>7</sup> Dixon.

<sup>8</sup> Dixon.

<sup>9</sup> Peter Maass, *Love Thy Neighbor: A Story of War* (New York: Vintage Books, 1997), 32.

<sup>10</sup> Maass.

murder or other violent acts did so because they were Serbs and that the agency of individual perpetrators was overshadowed or determined by some biological predispositions or cultural indoctrination. Furthermore, a similar thing about the role of ethnic and religious identities can be said about the Bosnian Muslims, although not in connection with violence. The Muslims in Bosnia were Slavs who converted to Islam centuries ago under Ottoman rule. Their identity, however, was in most cases nowhere near orthodox. In fact, most of them ate pork, drank alcohol, and only rarely visited a mosque.<sup>11</sup> Therefore, an attempt to explain the conflict in Bosnia as an innate clash between Orthodox, Catholic, and Muslim identities would be, just like an attempt to look for a collective responsibility, surely misleading.

Another generalized grant narrative is instrumentalism, which lies on the opposite side of primordialism and ethnonationalism. Instrumentalists tend to argue that conflicts are the products of manipulation by the political elite, emphasizing the fluid nature of different identities that change over time.<sup>12</sup> Although this narrative suggest a more refined approach towards conflict analysis, it reduces the complexity of conflict to a simple explanation focused on the motivations of political leaders, and essentially deprives the population of agency. In the case of Bosnia, instrumentalists would probably argue that the main reason why people went to war and why the war escalated into campaigns of mass violence was the elite manipulation by people such as Radovan Karadžić, then president of Bosnian Serbs, or the Serbian president at the time, Slobodan Milošević. Yet the issue with such interpretations is that by focusing only on the elite, and by depriving the general population of agency, it largely fails to account for the complexity of the conflict and for events that occurred on the ground.<sup>13</sup> An example of these narratives being used in practice is Thomas L. Friedman's argument in the *New York Times* which claimed that the conflicts in Syria, Iraq, Libya, Afghanistan, and Bosnia "are all the same war."<sup>14</sup> The problem with such narratives is the fact that they in no way further our understanding of various conflicts, rob them of uniqueness and lump them together under labels such as ethnic or sectarian wars.<sup>15</sup>

In terms of theory, this inquiry is predominantly based on two recent works published in the field of genocide studies. The first is Kjell Anderson's *Perpetrating Genocide: A Criminological Account*, which provides a multi-level analysis arguing that individual action in

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<sup>11</sup> Maass, 28.

<sup>12</sup> Dixon, "Beyond Sectarianism in the Middle East?", 14-15.

<sup>13</sup> Dixon, 16.

<sup>14</sup> Dixon, "Beyond Sectarianism in the Middle East?", 15.

<sup>15</sup> Dixon, 16.



genocide can only be understood in the context of individual interaction with social expectations, and that the perpetrators' adjustment to the criminogenic moral context is the main driving force in perpetrating the crime of genocide.<sup>16</sup> However, this thesis does not use the word genocide to describe the events in Prijedor, as the term by itself is of a principally legal nature and relies on the specific intent to, in this case, destroy in whole or in part a given group, defined predominantly on religious, ethnic, or racial grounds.<sup>17</sup> Furthermore, the label genocide is often used politically, or to signify that the event that transpired is more serious than other occurrences of similar nature, such as ethnic cleansing.<sup>18</sup> This paper argues that the label genocide would not do justice to the topic, and that in this case the question is not whether an individual raped, tortured, and murder their victims with this specific intent. This particular viewpoint is based on the arguments put forward by Christian Axboe Nielsen in his article focused on the use of the term genocide in respect to the war in Bosnia.<sup>19</sup> However, Anderson's arguments about how genocide is structured are very much applicable to the study of mass violence at large, without having to focus only on genocide, which will be demonstrated in other sections of this paper. The second book that this paper is influenced by is *Perpetrators and Perpetration of Mass Violence: Action, Motivations and Dynamics*, edited by Timothy Williams and Susanne Buckley-Zistel. Here, several authors offer an interdisciplinary insight into the realm of perpetration of mass violence, dealing with, among other things, concepts such as ideological diversity or the symbolic aspects of participation.

In essence, the arguments and theories put forward by Anderson as well as Williams and Buckley-Zistel then form the main analytical tools the author of this paper uses to ultimately answer the question; how did the interaction between context and agency affect the actions of perpetrators of mass violence in the region of Prijedor during summer 1992? To answer this question, through a multi-level analysis this inquiry establishes the hypothesis that the violence in Prijedor was enabled through contextual factors at the time but ultimately was the product of individual decision making. The period that this inquiry examines revolves around the most severe and vicious acts of mass violence which took place in the Prijedor municipality between

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<sup>16</sup> Anderson.

<sup>17</sup> Edina Bećirević, "The Issue of Genocidal Intent and Denial of Genocide: A Case Study of Bosnia and Herzegovina," *East European Politics & Societies* 24, no. 4 (November 1, 2010), 482, 496-499.

<sup>18</sup> Bećirević, 480-482; Dennis Gratz, "Elitocide in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Its Impact on the Contemporary Understanding of the Crime of Genocide," *Nationalities Papers* 39, no. 3 (May 2011), 409-412.

<sup>19</sup> Christian Axboe Nielsen, "Surmounting the Myopic Focus on Genocide: The Case of the War in Bosnia and Herzegovina," *Journal of Genocide Research* 15, no. 1 (March 2013): 21-39.

May and August 1992, while also discussing the drafting of plans for the implementation of the policy of ethnic cleansing, which occurred before the violence itself erupted.

The way this thesis goes on to answer this question is by scrutinizing case files from the ICTY related to the region of Prijedor. There are, however, several limitations regarding these sources. Despite the overwhelming amount of material, it is important to keep in mind that these are legal documents, and the perpetrators who were on trial often describe their version of the events in a way which would portray them in a more favorable light. Another limitation to keep in mind when using these sources to reconstruct certain events is that, despite the large amount of detailed descriptions in them, case reconstructions of crimes can never be fully complete. Even though the prosecution and defense alike rely on forensic evidence, they likewise have to depend on testimonies from various witnesses, including the victims. Naturally, limitations of human memory then also become a factor which must be taken into consideration, much like the fact that there might be witnesses out there who did not wish or could not testify in court, and as such the story will always remain incomplete.

In terms of structure, this paper will analyze this case by constructing a multi-level analysis with the main focus placed on the micro level, as the research question suggests. After the introduction a section on the historical background of the region will follow. Afterwards, the employed framework and methodology will be discussed. Subsequently, the main analysis will be presented, split into three core chapters with each one dedicated to a different level. In the end, a concluding section will summarize the main arguments presented in this paper. Ultimately, the author of this thesis aims to make a contribution to the field of conflict studies by furthering the understanding of organizational and behavioral aspects of mass violence.

### **Historical Background**

Before this paper can delve into the main analysis of violence in Prijedor, it is necessary to first shortly elaborate on the history of the region and address the escalation of the conflict in Bosnia. In order to do so, this chapter will first focus on the Islamization of Bosnia under the Ottoman rule and on how myths and historical developments impacted Serb national identity. The reason why this is included in this chapter is the fact that, in one way or another, these issues still resonated during the war in Bosnia, much like the events of World War II. As such, it is important to understand the Serbo-Bosnian relationship from a historical perspective even if one is to study much later periods. The main part of this chapter will then be dedicated to how

the war in Bosnia broke out, what preceded the escalation of violence, how the international community responded, and where the region of Prijedor fits into it all.

After Bosnia was conquered in 1463 by the Ottomans, the Bosniaks (a term that stands for Bosnian Muslims), converted from Christianity to Islam.<sup>20</sup> It is hard to say for sure what the precise reason for their conversion was, yet in her book *Genocide on the Drina River*, Edina Bećirević refers to two opposing debates among historians focused on this topic. One view is that the Patarins, described as “Bosnian dual heretics who rejected the authority of both church and state,” converted to Islam altogether solely because it was not forced upon them, unlike Christianity.<sup>21</sup> Those against this theory instead claim that pre-Ottoman Bosnia in fact lacked religious belief and church organization.<sup>22</sup> In comparison, strong and unified national church structures were present during this period in both Serbia and Bulgaria, which might explain why Islam succeeded in Bosnia on a much greater scale than elsewhere.<sup>23</sup> The Bosniaks were, however, much like the Serbs, Slavs, and their identity was nowhere near orthodox.<sup>24</sup> The reason why their conversion matters so deeply in respect to the subject of this inquiry is the fact that the Bosniaks were, in Serbian intellectual and national political circles, often labeled as “traitors” and “heretics” to Orthodoxy.<sup>25</sup> This belief was particularly strong during the late 1980s and early 1990s, when it constituted an important part of the Serbian nationalistic propaganda, which was built around an interpretation that they converted to Islam “out of self-interest or capitulated under coercion.”<sup>26</sup>

However, an essential thing to note in respect to the Serbian pursuit of national unity and their anti-Islamic tendencies, is the mixture of historical reality with myth, kept vividly alive in Serb culture. The Serbs had more than enough experience of being themselves oppressed by foreign conquerors. In 1389, a great army led by Tsar Lazar was defeated by the Turks at Kosovo Polje, the Field of Blackbirds.<sup>27</sup> This event had a tremendous impact on Serb national culture, being remembered as a holy event during which the “the goodness of God was fulfilled,” as a famous poem states.<sup>28</sup> However, their defeat was also partly caused by their lack of unity, and the need for unity thus remained a strong driving force in the future, with their

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<sup>20</sup> Edina Bećirević, *Genocide on the Drina River* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014), 23.

<sup>21</sup> Bećirević, 23.

<sup>22</sup> Bećirević.

<sup>23</sup> Bećirević.

<sup>24</sup> Maass, *Love Thy Neighbor*, 32.

<sup>25</sup> Bećirević, *Genocide on the Drina River*, 23.

<sup>26</sup> Bećirević, 23.

<sup>27</sup> Maass, *Love Thy Neighbor*, 89.

<sup>28</sup> Maass.

main slogan being “Only Unity Saves the Serbs.”<sup>29</sup> Even if one takes a step back from the myth, Serbian history is full of fighting against foreign oppressors where the only way to ensure survival was through wit and ruthlessness.<sup>30</sup>

Another important historical factor that cannot be underestimated when assessing the relationship between Serbs and Bosniaks, and that had a considerable impact on the ideological narrative which influenced the society in Bosnia in the 1990s, were the ethnic based vicious massacres of World War II. Some Bosnian Muslims aligned themselves with the fascist Croatian *Ustaša* movement against ethnic Serbs, which the Serbs would not forget when targeting Bosniaks decades later.<sup>31</sup> On the other hand, members of the extreme Serb nationalist and royalist *Četnik* movement would commit numerous genocidal massacres against Muslims, Croats, and Communist-led Yugoslav Partisans.<sup>32</sup> However, once Yugoslavia became reestablished after the end of the war, Tito promoted a principle of “brotherhood and unity” and combined it with a dictatorial ruling style, which in essence suppressed any republic-level nationalistic attempts and promoted a shared Yugoslav identity.<sup>33</sup> However, this also meant that Tito gave primacy to these principles over reconciliation with the past, which worked while he was alive, but provided a fruitful ground for fragmentation after his death.<sup>34</sup>

With the rise of nationalistic figures such as Slobodan Milošević in Serbia and Franjo Tuđman in Croatia, the region of Yugoslavia would soon be plunged into chaos and Bosnia would become a theater of dreadful violence for several years.<sup>35</sup> On 2 January 1992, a peace agreement was signed in Sarajevo that officially ended the war in Croatia.<sup>36</sup> While in Sarajevo, the U.N. envoy Cyrus Vance reinforced the importance of this agreement and stated that he did not believe that the war would spread to Bosnia and Herzegovina.<sup>37</sup> However, in practice, the implementation of the U.N. agreement included a redeployment of the Yugoslav People’s Army’s (JNA) artillery from Croatia to Bosnia and Herzegovina, practically fostering an occupation.<sup>38</sup> In the multiparty elections held on 18 November, 1990, nationalistic parties ended

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<sup>29</sup> Maass, 89.

<sup>30</sup> Majstorovic, “Ancient Hatreds or Elite Manipulation?”, 174-175.

<sup>31</sup> Maass, *Love Thy Neighbor*, 87-95.

<sup>32</sup> Marko Attila Hoare, “Genocide in the Former Yugoslavia Before and After Communism,” *Europe-Asia Studies* 62, no. 7 (September 2010), 1197-1198.

<sup>33</sup> Bećirević, *Genocide on the Drina River*, 46.

<sup>34</sup> Bećirević, 16.

<sup>35</sup> Hoare, “Genocide in the Former Yugoslavia Before and After Communism,” 1207.

<sup>36</sup> David N. Gibbs, *First Do No Harm: Humanitarian Intervention and the Destruction of Yugoslavia* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2009), 104.

<sup>37</sup> Bećirević, *Genocide on the Drina River*, 50.

<sup>38</sup> Bećirević.

up being the dominant political forces, with power being divided along these lines. In the summer of 1991, the Serbian Democratic Party (SDS), with Radovan Karadžić as its leader, started intense military preparations, reinforcing its plan of creating Serb municipalities in areas where Serbs formed a majority.<sup>39</sup> In essence, the JNA became an instrument of ethnic Serbs used to implement their goals. In 1991, Montenegrin reservists were deployed to JNA barracks in Mostar, initiating a terror on the Muslim and Croat populations throughout the region of Herzegovina, culminating in the attack on the Bosnian Croat village of Ravno in October 1991.<sup>40</sup> In practice, Milošević started preparing the Bosnian Serbs for war.

During the night from 14 to 15 October 1991, Muslim and Croat parliamentarians passed a resolution that demanded sovereignty for Bosnia and Herzegovina, with Serb nationalists leaving before the voting process started. However, before leaving Parliament, Karadžić issued the first open threat towards the Muslims in case they would choose to vote for independence, claiming that the Muslims might perish as they were unable to defend themselves.<sup>41</sup> In addition to this, an agreement had been previously discussed between Milošević and Tuđman on 25 March at a meeting in Karadorđevo, where a partition of Bosnia and Herzegovina between Serbia and Croatia had been discussed.<sup>42</sup> Therefore, a clear aim of dividing the country was now established, with Alija Izetbegović, the President of Bosnia and Herzegovina, being supposedly unsurprised by this.<sup>43</sup> These political maneuvers resulted in a further division between the Bosniaks and Croats which in turn led to several engagements between the Bosnian Army and Croat forces once the fighting broke out, despite the fact that they maintained a distrustful alliance against the Serbs. In 1993, this alliance eventually fell apart and the situation escalated into an all-out war once the Bosnian government and Bosnian Croats accepted the Vance-Owen peace plan, which labeled the provinces in Bosnia exclusively on ethnic terms and provided a further incentive for war.<sup>44</sup> A war that would only end with the direct involvement of the United States in March 1994.<sup>45</sup>

However, coming back to the resolution passed by the Bosnian Parliament on 15 October 1991, the SDS leaders started planning their next steps right after. Their intent was to further the previously envisaged process of “regionalization” by creating parallel organs of

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<sup>39</sup> Bećirević, 53.

<sup>40</sup> Bećirević, 54.

<sup>41</sup> Bećirević.

<sup>42</sup> Bećirević, 55.

<sup>43</sup> Bećirević.

<sup>44</sup> Bećirević, 57; Gibbs, *First Do No Harm*, 146-147.

<sup>45</sup> Bećirević, *Genocide on the Drina River*, 57.

authority to essentially form a Bosnian-Serb para-state inside Bosnia and Herzegovina.<sup>46</sup> By mid-October Bosnian Serbs were already developing their own political, administrative, and paramilitary institutions and on 9 and 10 November, they voted in a plebiscite to remain a part of Yugoslavia. The Assembly of Serb People of Bosnia and Herzegovina then declared that in those municipalities where Serbs, even if they were in a minority, voted, would remain a part of Yugoslavia. On 19 December 1991, the Main Board of the SDS had authorized two versions of secret instructions that were then sent to municipal party headquarters.<sup>47</sup> Version A dealt with municipalities in which Serbs were the majority, covering every stage of war preparation, such as the establishment of crisis headquarters, the formation of duty rosters in municipalities, or the designation of Serb assemblies on the municipal level. In essence, these instructions can be seen as blueprints for the ultimate plan of occupying the respective regions of Bosnia and Herzegovina.<sup>48</sup> Version B, which was addressed to municipalities where Serbs were in a minority, instructions were given for the establishment of assemblies in concord with legal multiethnic municipal assemblies. Furthermore, orders were issued to set up hidden storage and supply dumps, which were to be filled with food and other necessary provisions. These preparations were the continuation of a process already started in August 1991, when Karadžić released guidelines that ordered municipal committees to covertly work with local committees to organize the Serb population in a way that it would be able to quickly react to a call for mobilization.<sup>49</sup> In addition to this, the crisis headquarters were ordered to cooperate with the command of the JNA with the Crisis Staff becoming an essential instrument for coordinating plans and maintaining information flow across different levels of administration.<sup>50</sup> On 9 January 1992, the Republic of Serb People of Bosnia and Herzegovina was proclaimed, being renamed Republika Srpska (RS) eight months later, and by late 1992 it was constitutionally defined as a purely ethnic Serbian state.<sup>51</sup> When the war in Bosnia ultimately broke out in April 1992 with the Siege of Sarajevo, the blueprints for mobilization and a campaign of ethnic cleansing were already established.

In Prijedor, the SDS likewise played an essential role in overthrowing the legitimate authorities and establishing a Serbian municipality. During the war in Croatia in 1991, the

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<sup>46</sup> Bećirević, 58.

<sup>47</sup> Bećirević.

<sup>48</sup> Bećirević.

<sup>49</sup> Bećirević, 59.

<sup>50</sup> Gratz, "Elitocide in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Its Impact on the Contemporary Understanding of the Crime of Genocide," 414.

<sup>51</sup> Bećirević, *Genocide on the Drina River*, 61.

municipality experienced a giant influx of Serb refugees from Slovenia and Croatia, while the Muslims and Croats were beginning to leave the municipality due to a growing sense of fear and insecurity.<sup>52</sup> In August 1991, a Serbian paramilitary unit called the “Wolves of Vučjak” took over a transmitting station at Mount Kozara and replaced the broadcast of TV Sarajevo by propaganda broadcasts from Banja Luka and Belgrade.<sup>53</sup> On 27 December, SDS representatives decided to overthrow Prijedor’s legitimate authorities, replace them with their own personnel, and create independent Serb bodies. On 7 January 1992, the Assembly of the Serbian People of the Municipality of Prijedor was proclaimed, with Milomir Stakić being elected as the President. The actual takeover that happened on the night of 29 to 30 April 1992 had been planned for months. Once the Bosnian Serb forces took control of Prijedor, a campaign of systematic atrocities started to be implemented. It included the murder of approximately 200 men at Mount Vlašić as well as the establishment of the Omarska, Keraterm, and Trnopolje concentration camps. In his book *Love Thy Neighbor: A Story of War*, American reporter Peter Maass described his feelings upon visiting the Trnopolje and Omarska camps:

My initial impulse was to be filled with anger and hatred against the Serbs. It’s only natural. But then, as I listened closely to a Bosnian man crying as he described what hell was like, I heard him say that Serbs helped him; while one of his Serb neighbors was kicking him in the face with army boots, another Serb neighbor stepped in and demanded that the assault stop. [...] You hear about acts of decency, such as Serb soldiers who were ordered to rape girls and, after taking the girls away, did not touch them but told them to say that they had been raped. It is wrong to retreat into a blind rage against the Serbs. Few were camp guards, fewer still were torturers. Most were lemmings, a common affliction in all societies, and a handful were even heroes. Serbs are, like all humans, deeply flawed, and their actions in Bosnia are a reminder of that. It would be wrong to conclude that they are more flawed than anyone else. [...] The Serbs do not have a monopoly on moral insanity. It is humans who have failed, once more.<sup>54</sup>

The reason why this passage is included in this thesis is that it accurately captures the feelings one will most likely have when reading about the appalling atrocities committed in Bosnia. Yet the passage also captures one of the main points of this paper, which is that violence, including mass murder and all forms of torture, is a human phenomenon. It cannot be

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<sup>52</sup> Prosecutor v. Momčilo Krajišnik, IT-00-39-T, Judgment, 193 (ICTY, September 27, 2006), <http://www.icty.org/x/cases/krajisnik/tjug/en/kra-jud060927e.pdf>.

<sup>53</sup> *Krajišnik*, IT-00-39-T, 82.

<sup>54</sup> Maass, *Love Thy Neighbor*, 54-55.

explained by structural narratives such as primordialism or ethnonationalism, which might have been so popular precisely because they offer a way, albeit an incorrect one, of making sense of the horrors of mass violence for those of us who could never imagine something like that happening in our societies. It is, in a sense, an easy way out, because it enables us to say that this happened because of the nature of those people. That this would not be possible in our society, because we are different. That we are undeniably distinct from Serbs, Croats, or Hutus. Such narrative protects us from the chilling reality of the human nature by allowing us to say that mass violence is a case of Bosnia, Rwanda, or Cambodia, as it is easier to claim such things than to admit that it is an inherently human phenomenon.

### **Theoretical Framework and Methodology**

As already outlined in the introduction, the main part of this study is formed by three distinctive yet intertwined chapters, where each chapter deals with a different level of the structure of violence. In essence, this thesis makes use of the theoretical framework on perpetration put forward by Anderson to gain insight into the realm of perpetration, especially in connection with the emergence and creation of a context of mass violence, the impact of propaganda on the alteration of moral context, and with how perpetrators' reasoning and decision-making function.

A considerable part of the previous chapter has been devoted to the political context of the war in Bosnia and to how the SDS operated and how Serbs in Bosnia essentially aligned themselves with Serbs in the rest of Yugoslavia, ultimately forming their own state within the Bosnian borders. As such, on the macro-level, this thesis will deal with the emergence of the context of mass violence in respect to the state, which is a necessary actor for the facilitation of mass violence. Anderson claims that the pre-genocidal context is "a state of disequilibrium requiring a corrective: genocide."<sup>55</sup> However, the argument presented here is that the mass violence which occurred in Prijedor, albeit not being classified as genocide due to the lack of the *dolus specialis*, did indeed include many traits of a genocidal campaign, and as such Anderson's framework is applicable in this case. In essence, on the macro level, it will be used to scrutinize how the context of mass violence came to exist in Prijedor, in respect to the larger situation in Bosnia, and how structures that facilitated violence were created. Therefore, in the first main chapter, the emphasis will be put on how the state, and its representatives, created a context of mass violence through the establishment of various power relations and through

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<sup>55</sup> Anderson, *Perpetrating Genocide*, 37.



intense propaganda. Despite the fact that ideology is not a self-explanatory factor and that its impact very much depends on an individual's self-affiliation with it, propaganda is an essential part of communicating the moral context by defining the enemy and the desirable course of action, shaping the perpetrators' perspective.<sup>56</sup> Accordingly, the analysis on this level will make use of cases such as Karadžić, Krajišnik, and Plavšić.

On the meso level, this thesis will focus on the case of Milomir Stakić, who was elected President of the Assembly of the Serbian People of the Municipality of Prijedor after a decision had been reached to overthrow the legitimate authorities. As the President of the Prijedor Municipality Crisis Staff and as Head of the Municipal Council for National Defense in Prijedor, Stakić was responsible for the murder of more than 1,500 people in the Prijedor municipality, ordered and planned the deportations of around 20,000 mostly non-Serb inhabitants from the Prijedor municipality, and actively participated in the establishment of the Omarska, Keraterm, and Trnopolje concentration camps.<sup>57</sup> The reason why Stakić is so important here is the fact that he was the leading political figure in the municipality of Prijedor in 1992, and as such played an essential role in creating the structures of mass violence and shaping the implementation of policies of ethnic cleansing. Through the case of Stakić this thesis will scrutinize how the Crisis Staff operated within the municipality, focusing on Stakić's capacity to make decisions and mobilize people, his social role in the process, his actual role in the killings, and his role as a mediator between a larger ideological and political context and the precise physical establishment of institutions and the implementation of definite policies. In essence, it deals with the process of "from context to killing."<sup>58</sup>

Most importantly, being the main section of this analysis, the micro level discussion will make extensive use of cases such as Mrđa, Sikirica et al., and Kvočka et al. All of these cases deal with micro level perpetration of various acts of violence, including torture, rape, and murder. The details provided in these primary sources then allow the author to construct an in-depth analysis of how the perpetration of mass violence in the Prijedor municipality was structured. In terms of theory, this section will use the typology of perpetration developed by Anderson, as well as the argument on ideological diversity of perpetrators, by Jonathan Leader

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<sup>56</sup> Anderson, 87;

Jonathan Leader Maynard, "Theorizing Ideological Diversity in Mass Violence," in *Perpetrators and Perpetration of Mass Violence: Actions, Motivations and Dynamics*, ed. Timothy Williams and Susanne Buckley-Zistel, Routledge Studies in Genocide and Crimes against Humanity (Abingdon, Oxon ; New York, NY: Routledge, 2018), 58–79.

<sup>57</sup> *Stakić*, IT-97-24-T, 93-112.

<sup>58</sup> Anderson, *Perpetrating Genocide*, 150.

Maynard.<sup>59</sup> Connecting with previous chapters, this chapter will ultimately focus on the grizzly details of on-the-ground perpetration and the reasoning behind it. Using the aforementioned framework, this inquiry will paint the picture of how all of the complex processes of mass violence eventually played out on the ground, how the actual killings and abuse were perpetrated and then subsequently dealt with, and on where the perpetrators fit in on a larger scheme.

The selection of sources was therefore performed based on the factual information provided in them in respect to the roles of the accused individuals. The sources were subsequently qualitatively assessed and employed on the basis of constructing an argument in line with the theoretical framework. As such, they were not used in their entirety, for they also deal with predominantly legal aspects such as the determination of criminal responsibility through the acknowledgments of various legal circumstances.

### **The Macro Level**

During the war in Bosnia, the Bosnian Serb leadership focused, among other things, on a deliberate implementation of a policy of ethnic cleansing to ensure the creation of an ethnically homogenous Serb state.<sup>60</sup> It can be argued that some of the most prominent political figures among the ranks of Bosnian Serbs were Radovan Karadžić, Momčilo Krajišnik, and Biljana Plavšić. In this section, court documents will be examined to establish the case of how the aforementioned politicians, together with the help of others, contributed to the creation of an apparatus of state-conducted mass violence directed against the non-Serb population of Bosnia. However, before the analysis can fully begin, it is important to briefly elaborate on the role and background of each of these political figures, as their impact on the creation of a state that structured mass violence can only be understood in connection with their respective political standing.

First, Radovan Karadžić was the founding member of the SDS and its President until 19 July 1996, Chairman of the National Security Council of the Serbian Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina (later RS), President of the three-member Presidency of RS from its creation on 12 May 1992 until the 17 December, and thereafter sole President of RS and Supreme Commander of its armed forces until July 1996.<sup>61</sup> He stood at the forefront of developing the

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<sup>59</sup> Maynard, “Theorizing Ideological Diversity in Mass Violence”, 58–79.

<sup>60</sup> *Krajišnik and Plavšić*, IT-00-39 & 40-PT, 2.

<sup>61</sup> *Prosecutor v. Radovan Karadžić*, IT-95-5/18-T, Public Redacted Version of Judgment Issued on 24 March 2016, Vol. I, 1-2 (ICTY, March 24, 2016), [http://www.icty.org/x/cases/karadzic/tjug/en/160324\\_judgement.pdf](http://www.icty.org/x/cases/karadzic/tjug/en/160324_judgement.pdf).

ideology and policies which led to the creation of a predominantly ethnically homogenous Bosnian Serb state through mass violence. Second, Biljana Plavšić was a leading Bosnian Serb politician from 1990 until the end of the war, Serbian representative to the collective Presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina, member of the collective and expanded Presidencies of the Bosnian Serb Republic (later RS), and in reality had control and authority over members of the Bosnian Serb armed forces.<sup>62</sup> Third, Momčilo Krajišnik was a member of the Main Board of the SDS and a President of the Bosnian Serb Assembly.<sup>63</sup> The ICTY ruled that based on his position, Krajišnik had authority over the Bosnian Serb forces as well as over political and governmental organs and their agents.<sup>64</sup>

#### *A context of mass violence*

In respect to the context of the genocidal state, the process of genocide, in this case mass violence exhibiting genocidal traits in most aspects, has been, in the modern period, facilitated by extraordinary social conditions which result in a state of disequilibrium produced by major political and socio-economic disruption and collapse.<sup>65</sup> In the case of Bosnia and Herzegovina these disruptions and upheavals were mainly created by the economic and political fragmentation of Yugoslavia, which in turn facilitated ethnic and political disintegration within Bosnia. Conditions such as these then resulted in a shifting of moral norms as well. To emphasize his point about the genocidal context, Anderson refers to Robert Merton and Robert Agnew's so-called "strain theory", which argues that society creates ambitions and cultural goals without implementing sufficient structures to obtain them.<sup>66</sup> As such, this might result in a state of *anomie* – "normlessness", which causes the loss of a society's moral authority.<sup>67</sup> In essence, Agnew identified three primary sources of strain:

1. When an individual or collectivity is prevented from reaching a goal,
2. When something of value is threatened or lost,
3. When something negative or unwelcome is instituted.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> Prosecutor v. Biljana Plavšić, IT-00-39 & 40/1-S, Sentencing Judgment, 2-6 (ICTY, February 27, 2003), <http://www.icty.org/x/cases/plavsic/tjug/en/pla-tj030227e.pdf>.

<sup>63</sup> *Krajišnik*, IT-00-39-T, 9.

<sup>64</sup> *Krajišnik*, 414-415.

<sup>65</sup> Anderson, *Perpetrating Genocide*, 19; Alexander Laban Hinton, *Why Did They Kill? Cambodia in the Shadow of Genocide*, California Series in Public Anthropology 11 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 282.

<sup>66</sup> Anderson, *Perpetrating Genocide*, 20.

<sup>67</sup> Anderson.

<sup>68</sup> Anderson.

All of these sources of strain could be found in the turmoil of the early 1990s, when Muslim and Croat parliamentarians focused their efforts on demanding sovereignty for Bosnia and Herzegovina, yet the Serbs wished to remain a part of Yugoslavia. The loss of group power or status, with which it is possible to describe the situation for Serbs around this period, can result in a collective strain, which may in turn be addressed by extremist ideologies and policies developed by “visionaries”, in this case intellectuals such as Karadžić and Plavšić.<sup>69</sup> On the one hand, strain is then externally projected onto the victim group, while on the other glorification of the in-group promotes internal cohesion. The most important point here is the fact that the state then presents itself as restoring order in times of perceived normlessness.<sup>70</sup> Krajišnik’s speech to the Deputies’ Club at the end of February 1992 can be considered a fitting example of how strain was projected onto the Bosnian Muslims through extreme political rhetoric; “[the Muslims] want the armed forces of Bosnia and Herzegovina; they want the currency; they want a unitary Bosnia and Herzegovina; they want an Islamic state.”<sup>71</sup> He proceeded to state that “If the Muslims do not want to live with us in Yugoslavia, if they want to impose a unitary Bosnia on us in an unconstitutional way, then we are rightfully afraid to live with them in a sealed-off Bosnia-Herzegovina where they are dominant.”<sup>72</sup>

Another essential factor in the creation of the context of mass violence is the step of radicalization, where the state adopts a survivalist discourse narrative that enables it to revise collective moral rules as well as monopolize the legal codification of deviant behavior and legitimize violence.<sup>73</sup> A crucial point to emphasize in connection with this is the creation of a so-called “humanity gap”, a social distance between perpetrators and victims, which becomes possible due to a drastic reduction of normally complex individual identities to one layers of identity, resulting in dehumanization.<sup>74</sup> On the other hand, in-group collective identity is strengthened.<sup>75</sup> In essence, on one end there is a process of stigmatization that influences the moral context, and on the other the state becomes an embodiment of the group. Furthermore, in the context of state-perpetrated mass violence, the state normalizes extreme violence with the justification of providing security.<sup>76</sup> The final remark in respect to the genocidal state is the fact that “state elites will not commit genocide unless it is within their power, furthers their interests,

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<sup>69</sup> Anderson, 20.

<sup>70</sup> Anderson, 20-21.

<sup>71</sup> *Krajišnik*, IT-00-39-T, 322.

<sup>72</sup> *Krajišnik*, 323.

<sup>73</sup> Anderson, *Perpetrating Genocide*, 26-32.

<sup>74</sup> Anderson, 28.

<sup>75</sup> Hinton, *Cambodia in the Shadow*, 243.

<sup>76</sup> Anderson, *Perpetrating Genocide*, 30-37.

and aligns with the ‘founding narrative’ of the state.”<sup>77</sup> Although this point might seem obvious at first, it is important to keep in mind that the campaigns of ethnic cleansing that spread throughout Bosnia were preceded by careful planning and the development of separate Serbian institutions within the borders of Bosnia. Even after the campaign unfolded, the state elites were, for a long time, substantially free in the execution of their will despite the involvement of the international community. For example, Karadžić was in open denial in respect to the concentration camps in Prijedor, claiming that pictures taken of them were fakes.<sup>78</sup>

### *Propaganda*

One of the main aspects of a shifting societal context from normal to extreme, and one of the main facilitating factors of this shift, is undeniably the role of propaganda. The main function of hate propaganda is the communication of new moral norms. In essence, propaganda works in two ways. On the one hand, it creates normative justification for violence, while on the other the use of violence forms a need for propaganda for the purpose of coherence, as the individual requires to frame their actions in consistence with the moral norms.<sup>79</sup> Propaganda represents the opinion of the state, which is then communicated from public into the private sphere of people’s lives.<sup>80</sup> It strengthens group cohesion through the reinforcement of notions such as race or ethnicity, and reframes moral rules via the embracement of myths together with a direct incitement to violence.<sup>81</sup> One of the most important functions of violent ideology is the fact that, through survivalist discourse, it frames individual participation as necessary due to the urgent nature of the perceived threat.<sup>82</sup> However, if a state is to utilize propaganda to achieve its goals, it must first seize control of propaganda instruments.<sup>83</sup> In the case of Prijedor, this happened in August 1991, when the Wolves of Vučjak seized control of the transmitting station at Mount Kozara, and allowed for the broadcast of Serb propaganda. The group, responsible for numerous criminal activities, would later come to be praised by Krajišnik, who told its members that:

Both your friends and your enemies will remember your bravery. Led by your legendary commander Veljko Milanković, you will go down in history. You belonged to the unit

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<sup>77</sup> Anderson, 37.

<sup>78</sup> Maass, *Love Thy Neighbor*, 41.

<sup>79</sup> Anderson, *Perpetrating Genocide*, 71.

<sup>80</sup> Anderson, 69-87.

<sup>81</sup> Anderson.

<sup>82</sup> Anderson, 75; Hinton, *Cambodia in the Shadow*, 285.

<sup>83</sup> Anderson, 77.

that every Army of this world would be proud of. Your deeds are immortal. You are the heroes of the third Serbian uprising and you belonged to the whole Serbian nation!<sup>84</sup>

Anderson notes that, contrary to the popular belief, propaganda is not necessarily based on lies.<sup>85</sup> He then proceeds to identify two different categories of propaganda: group-binding and stigmatizing.<sup>86</sup> Whereas the group-binding one is focused on the in-group and constructed to boost support for collective action, stigmatizing propaganda is aimed at creating social distance from the out-group.<sup>87</sup>

In order to justify action, stigmatizing propaganda makes great use of dehumanizing the enemy through various persuasive narratives.<sup>88</sup> In the case of Bosnia, it could be said that those most dominant were emphasizing the alien nature of the Bosnian Muslims, recollecting past atrocities by historicizing the conflict, and portraying the enemy as “barbaric”, when Serbs accused Muslims of heinous acts they themselves were actually committing.<sup>89</sup> On 16 May 1992, the Bosnian Serb Minister of Information, Velibor Ostojić, proclaimed that “terror equal to genocide is being conducted against the innocent Serbian inhabitants in this war forced upon the Serbian people in Bosnia and Herzegovina” and that “Serbian people are being eliminated and massacred, their property plundered, their villages burned, their cities destroyed, and the monuments of Serbian culture and history shattered.”<sup>90</sup> In reality, Ostojić was basically describing the actions of Serbs.

Similar speeches were given by Plavšić, who publicly encouraged participation by claiming that force was justified because various territories within Bosnia and Herzegovina were Serbian by right and Serbs should be afraid of genocide being committed against them by Bosnian Muslims and Bosnian Croats.<sup>91</sup> The historicization of the conflict and the constant reminder of a Serb holocaust was a pervasive theme in the Bosnian-Serb propaganda. Interestingly, during her sentencing hearing, Plavšić admitted this by stating to the Trial Chamber that:

[a]lthough I was repeatedly informed of allegations of cruel and inhuman conduct against non-Serbs, I refused to accept them or even to investigate. In fact, I immersed

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<sup>84</sup> *Krajišnik*, IT-00-39-T, 350.

<sup>85</sup> Anderson, *Perpetrating Genocide*, 75.

<sup>86</sup> Anderson, 78, 85.

<sup>87</sup> Anderson, 78-87; Hinton, *Cambodia in the Shadow*, 283-285.

<sup>88</sup> Anderson, 78.

<sup>89</sup> Anderson, 83.

<sup>90</sup> *Krajišnik*, IT-00-39-T, 324.

<sup>91</sup> *Krajišnik and Plavšić*, IT-00-39 & 40-PT, 4.

myself in addressing the suffering of the war's innocent Serb victims. This daily work confirmed in my mind that we were in a struggle for our very survival and that in this struggle, the international community was our enemy, and so I simply denied these charges, making no effort to investigate. I remained secure in my belief that Serbs were not capable of such acts. In this obsession of ours to never again become victims, we had allowed ourselves to become victimisers.<sup>92</sup>

### *A policy of ethnic cleansing*

Having shifted societal moral norms and adopting a rhetoric of justified violence, the Bosnian Serb leadership started implementing their plans of ethnic cleansing of Serbian territories. During 1992, mainly between April and August, the Bosnian Serbs managed to conduct almost 70% of all the expulsions of non-Serbs that had occurred during the war, destroying approximately 850 Muslim and Croat villages in a campaign of ethnic persecution.<sup>93</sup> In the municipalities of Foča, Bratunac, Ključ, Prijedor, and Sanski Most, there were almost no Bosniaks left by the end of 1992.<sup>94</sup> The collective Presidency of the Serbian Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina, which was composed from 12 May to 2 June 1992 of Karadžić, Plavšić, and Nikola Koljević, and afterwards included also Krajišnik and Branko Đerić, had authority over the Army of Republika Srpska (VRS), and over the Bosnian Serb police, Territorial Defense, and civilian authorities.<sup>95</sup> Plavšić likewise played a role in inviting paramilitary units from territories outside of Bosnia and Herzegovina where Serbs lived, and, according to information provided in the judgment document of Karadžić, “Plavšić was the ‘bridge’ between Bosnian Serbs and the people who came from other states to assist in the conflict.”<sup>96</sup> Apart from openly supporting these units, Plavšić would refer to them as “weekend warriors.”<sup>97</sup>

With these tools at hand, the Bosnian Serb leadership could achieve its objective of ethnic separation by force, which included forced expulsion, widespread killings, destruction of property and religious buildings, and the establishment of detention facilities notorious for their inhumane treatment of prisoners.<sup>98</sup> On the outside, the leadership continued to deny its crimes, on occasions such as when Plavšić, during a television interview in July 1992, stated that those imprisoned in detention centers were only able-bodied men of military age who

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<sup>92</sup> *Plavšić*, IT-00-39 & 40/1-S, 17.

<sup>93</sup> *Plavšić*, 11.

<sup>94</sup> *Plavšić*.

<sup>95</sup> *Krajišnik and Plavšić*, IT-00-39 & 40-PT, 4.

<sup>96</sup> *Karadžić*, IT-95-5/18-T, Vol II, 1231.

<sup>97</sup> *Karadžić*, 1231.

<sup>98</sup> *Plavšić*, IT-00-39 & 40/1-S, 10.

actively participated in or in another way supported “rebellions.”<sup>99</sup> In May 1992, Plavšić stated that “if it takes the lives of 3 million people to solve this crisis, lets get it done and move on.”<sup>100</sup> By the end of 1992, the objective of an ethnically homogenous Serbian territory was, with the exception of Sarajevo, largely achieved.<sup>101</sup>

### *Conclusion*

During the early 1990s, societal strains caused by the fragmentation of Yugoslavia, which included a political and an economic crisis, were exploited by the Bosnian Serb leadership in a pursuit of an ethnically cleansed and homogenous Serb state. In this context, Serbian political leaders stressed, through intense propaganda, a picture of glorious Serbian nation that was now in grave danger of being annihilated by Croatian *Ustašas* on the one hand, and the Muslims on the other. This survivalist discourse and a historicized narrative presented a picture of Bosnian Serbs that would soon suffer genocide at the hands of their neighbors should they fail to unite and instead become a minority in a Muslim and Croat-dominated Bosnia and Herzegovina. This narrative was carefully reinforced and spread by people such as Radovan Karadžić, Biljana Plavšić, Momčilo Krajišnik, and other prominent members of the Bosnian Serb leadership. Through their actions, a context of justified violence had been established as a form of legitimate protection against an imminent threat. In this context, societal moral norms shifted and the Serbian Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina, later renamed to Republika Srpska, adopted a monopoly on violence, creating an environment in which violence, directed by the state, became a desirable type of social action.<sup>102</sup> In this context, the enemies of Serbs became dehumanized, their identity reduced to a collective label, and their very existence threatened. Having authority over the armed forces as well as over civilian institutions and authorities, the Bosnian Serb leaders started to implement their policy of ethnic cleansing through which an ethnically homogenous Serb state was to be created.

### **The Meso Level**

Having established a case in respect to the aims of the Bosnian Serb leadership and the overarching propaganda employed to achieve these aims, this thesis now turns to the analysis of the meso level. In essence, this chapter deals with the region of Prijedor from a perspective

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<sup>99</sup> Karadžić, IT-95-5/18-T, Vol II, 1232.

<sup>100</sup> Karadžić, 1231.

<sup>101</sup> Krajišnik, IT-00-39-T, 385.

<sup>102</sup> Christian Gudehus, “Violence as Action,” in *Perpetrators and Perpetration of Mass Violence: Actions, Motivations and Dynamics*, ed. Timothy Williams and Susanne Buckley-Zistel, Routledge Studies in Genocide and Crimes against Humanity (Abingdon, Oxon ; New York, NY: Routledge, 2018), 36-57.



focused on the establishment of structures that would ultimately make possible the eruption of mass violence, predominantly in the form of ethnic cleansing. The argument presented here is that without these structures, most of the micro level perpetrators would not have been able to engage in the severe acts of violence, and as such the focus is placed on the institutionalization of violence in the municipality of Prijedor. Therefore, this chapter examines how institutions such as the Prijedor Municipality Crisis Staff and the Municipal Council for National Defense in Prijedor operated and enabled micro level perpetration of mass violence. Accordingly, the case of Milomir Stakić stands at the forefront of this chapter, for Stakić was first elected as the President of the Assembly of the Serbian People of the Municipality of Prijedor, and after the takeover of power became the President of the Municipal Assembly and President of the Prijedor Municipal People's (National) Defense Council. From May 1992 Stakić served as President of the Prijedor Municipal Crisis Staff.<sup>103</sup> In essence, he was the leading figure in the Prijedor municipal government, playing an essential role in the ethnic cleansing of non-Serbs, actively participating in the establishment of the Omarska, Keraterm, and Trnopolje concentration camps, and in the end found responsible for the murder of more than 1,500 people in the municipality.<sup>104</sup>

As mentioned before, the takeover of power in Prijedor was an illegal *coup d'état* performed by the Serbian authorities on 30 April 1992.<sup>105</sup> Afterwards, Stakić and other SDS leaders took over positions in the municipal government, while forcibly removing the legally elected Muslim and Croat politicians. Stakić replaced Muhamed Čehajić as the President of the Municipal Assembly and simultaneously assumed the position of President of the Prijedor Municipal People's Defense Council. Anderson argues that in the genocidal context "the state emerges as a response to strain, and attempts to govern amidst extreme social disruption."<sup>106</sup> This strain has already been outlined in the previous chapter of this inquiry, yet it is interesting to point out the effects it had in Prijedor. Following the takeover, an announcement by Stakić was repeatedly read out on Radio Prijedor. In it, Stakić referred to numerous economic and societal problems present in the municipality, claiming that the people are living "in a state of anarchy, insecurity, poverty, and great fear."<sup>107</sup> Furthermore, he stated that:

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<sup>103</sup> Stakić, IT-97-24-T, 93.

<sup>104</sup> Stakić, 165-174.

<sup>105</sup> Stakić, 133.

<sup>106</sup> Anderson, *Perpetrating Genocide*, 63-64.

<sup>107</sup> Stakić, IT-97-24-T, 27.

Dozens of buses full of young Muslim men have gone to Austrian centres for military training under the pretext of going to work abroad. [...] On several occasions, Nijaz Duraković, the president of the Socialist Democratic Party, has called on its members [...] to wage war against Yugoslavia, the regular JNA, and thus, the Serbian people, which is unacceptable for all citizens of goodwill. [...] For all these reasons, we have decided to take over power in the municipality of Prijedor and, therefore, to take full responsibility for the peaceful and secure life of all citizens and peoples in our municipality, the protection of their property, the establishment of the rule of law, the organising of the economy, and normal life in the town and in the villages in the area of the municipality.<sup>108</sup>

In essence, Stakić legitimized the coup with the pretext of reestablishing stable societal norms, presenting the SDS leadership as a source of continuity. However, he also managed to reinforce the notion of distrust already planted among the citizens, claiming that Serbs are in danger of being attacked by Muslims.

After the takeover, the SDS authorities established a Crisis Staff, of which Stakić became the President, which took over the role of the Municipal Assembly while it was suspended during the period of imminent threat of war and during the state of war. In essence, according to constitutional expert Pavle Nikolić, “the Crisis Staff coordinated authority functions in order to defend the territory.”<sup>109</sup> The important thing to note is that the local Crisis Staffs were named by the Crisis Staff of the Autonomous Region of Krajina (ARK), which included Prijedor, “the highest organs of authority in the municipalities.”<sup>110</sup> On 15 July 1992 the Prijedor Crisis Staff implemented a decision issued by the Serbian Assembly of Bosnia and Herzegovina that changed the name of Crisis Staff to War Presidency, although in reality this change was solely cosmetic.<sup>111</sup>

Anderson identifies three norms that facilitate violence: obedience, conformity, and urgency.<sup>112</sup> In respect to obedience, the state structures individual choice by norms of social control that are “accompanied by sanctions that regulate social relations by punishing disobedience.”<sup>113</sup> In mobilizing the Serbian population, the Crisis Staff ordered conscripts and

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<sup>108</sup> Stakić, 27.

<sup>109</sup> Stakić, 97.

<sup>110</sup> Stakić, 97.

<sup>111</sup> Stakić, 98.

<sup>112</sup> Anderson, *Perpetrating Genocide*, 47-51.

<sup>113</sup> Anderson, 47.

those with a work obligation to carry out their assignment in accordance with the wartime plans. Furthermore, it added in a “Conclusion” that:

The managers of enterprises, organisations, and socio-political communities are bound by this Conclusion to penalise any failure to respond to the work obligation by dismissing such employees from work.<sup>114</sup>

Furthermore, on 5 May the People’s Defense Council ordered “all paramilitary units and individuals who possess weapons and ammunition illegally” to promptly surrender them under the threat that a failure to do so would result in “the most rigorous sanctions.”<sup>115</sup> In terms of conformity and urgency, the narrative presented by Stakić and other SDS leaders would further bind the Serbs together so as to defend themselves against a supposed Muslim attack, as demonstrated by Stakić’s speech following the takeover. In episodes of mass violence, conflict might arise between individual and group norms, which might be overcome by discourses that counter the supposed innocence of the victim group, and thus create a context in which the same moral rules do not apply to the victims.<sup>116</sup> In addition to this, the survivalist discourse, which is an essential trait of the urgency norm, allows the state to derogate even fundamental human rights, for example via defining enemy civilians as combatants or criminals.<sup>117</sup> In the case of Prijedor, propaganda terms such as “Ustaša”, “Green Berets”, or “Mujahedeen” were broadly used in press as synonyms for the general non-Serb population.<sup>118</sup>

Such narratives would also bind individuals more closely to the state.<sup>119</sup> In respect to structures that promote violence, it can be said that the most important ones here were the legal system, organization and compartmentalization of different bodies of authority, the use of violence specialists, and the establishment of concentration camps.<sup>120</sup> An important legal aspect was that in the period following the takeover, many non-Serbs were dismissed from their jobs, in accordance with an ARK Crisis Staff decision from 22 June 1992, which stated that:

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<sup>114</sup> Stakić, IT-97-24-T, 34.

<sup>115</sup> Stakić, 33.

<sup>116</sup> Anderson, *Perpetrating Genocide*, 50.

<sup>117</sup> Anderson, 50.

<sup>118</sup> Stakić, IT-97-24-T, 11.

<sup>119</sup> Anderson, *Perpetrating Genocide*, 48-49.

<sup>120</sup> Anderson, 51-60.

All executive posts, posts involving a likely flow of information, posts involving the protection of public property, that is all posts important for the functioning of the economy, may only be held by personnel of Serbian nationality.<sup>121</sup>

As such, the law was used to reinforce the persecution of the soon-to-be victim group.<sup>122</sup> In terms of organization, the Crisis Staff, the police and the military cooperated with one another in a horizontal way to bring about the accomplishment of their common goals, according to the Trial Chamber in the Stakić case.<sup>123</sup> This was also the case with the attacks on the village of Hambarine and the area of Kozarac in May 1992, which included heavy attacks on civilians.<sup>124</sup> The use of violence specialists in respect to Prijedor stands for the fact that, at least at this point, the violence was conducted primarily by trained agents of the state security apparatus, namely the police and the military. From a perspective of efficiency, the usage of such individuals is beneficial to the authoritarian state due to the fact that they are already familiar and socialized with the use of violence.<sup>125</sup> Following these attacks, many Muslim civilians ended up in the concentration camps of Omarska, Keraterm, and Trnopolje, which became a crucial point in their future victimization.<sup>126</sup> Anderson argues that concentration “delegitimizes victims’ claims to territory” and “renders them more vulnerable by placing them in areas which are often marginal.”<sup>127</sup> In such areas the act of killing then becomes much easier, as the perpetrators gain the power of deciding who lives and who dies.<sup>128</sup>

### *Conclusion*

Consequently, all of these norms and shifts contributed to the institutionalization of perpetration which in turn enabled the victimization of non-Serbs in Prijedor. As the leading political figure in the municipality, Milomir Stakić acted as a mid-level leader, having the possibility to view the killing as abstract, for he did not participate directly. Yet his position of power, through which he effectively exercised political control, might have granted the low-level perpetrators a sense of agency required to engage in the perpetration of mass violence.<sup>129</sup> In the next chapter, these precise acts of perpetration will be scrutinized.

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<sup>121</sup> *Stakić*, IT-97-24-T, 35.

<sup>122</sup> Anderson, *Perpetrating Genocide*, 52.

<sup>123</sup> *Stakić*, IT-97-24-T, 103.

<sup>124</sup> *Stakić*, 36-44.

<sup>125</sup> Anderson, *Perpetrating Genocide*, 55.

<sup>126</sup> *Stakić*, IT-97-24-T, 41.

<sup>127</sup> Anderson, *Perpetrating Genocide*, 59.

<sup>128</sup> Anderson, 60.

<sup>129</sup> Anderson, 100-101.

## The Micro Level

The previous two sections of this thesis have demonstrated the following. On the macro level, the state managed to, through its exercise of power and spreading of ideological propaganda, alter the moral context and the underlying societal norms. On the meso level, Serb SDS authorities then structurally institutionalized violence and reinforced the shift in discourse, openly targeting the non-Serb population of Prijedor. Therefore, the final chapter of this inquiry focuses on the role of individual agency in respect to perpetration of mass violence. The argument that will be put forward is that the perpetrators' agency played an essential role in the final decision-making, while norms and structures implemented by the state shaped the perpetrators' perception of the overall context and thus delineated a number of viable options for social action. In other words, the arguments presented in the two previous chapters, despite their importance for the overall understanding of mass violence in Prijedor, do not by themselves provide a sufficient explanation for the events that occurred on the ground. From a theoretical standpoint, this chapter builds on various arguments in respect to situational action theory, to understand the perpetrators' perceived range of options in a given moment.<sup>130</sup> For this reason, emphasis will be put on several areas of perpetration, such as the concentration camps of Omarska and Keraterm, to analyze the relationship between individual action, the possible reasoning behind it, and mass violence. For the purposes of clarity and in order to avoid excessive repetitiveness, this thesis does not focus on each camp individually, but rather analyzes them together with the intention to scrutinize the patterns of violence.

### *Introduction to the Omarska, Keraterm, and Trnopolje concentration camps*

On 23 May 1992, Serb forces attacked the previously mentioned predominantly Muslim village of Hambarine, displacing roughly 20,000 non-Serbs, and followed this with an attack on Kozarac the day after.<sup>131</sup> A significant number of Muslims who did not manage to flee these areas were then rounded up and taken into custody, ending up in one of the concentration camps.<sup>132</sup> On 30 May the Muslims of Prijedor were ordered to hang white sheets outside their homes as a demonstration of loyalty to the Serb regime, and then to tie white ribbons around their arms and move towards the center of town.<sup>133</sup> There, a group of approximately 2,000 individuals consisting of mostly Muslims but also Croats was formed and subsequently divided

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<sup>130</sup> Anderson, *Perpetrating Genocide*, 124.

<sup>131</sup> *Kvočka et al.*, IT-98-30/1-T, 5.

<sup>132</sup> *Kvočka et al.*

<sup>133</sup> *Kvočka et al.*, 6.

into two subgroups, with men between 15 and 65 years old in one group, and women, children, and the elderly in the second one.<sup>134</sup> A similar situation also unfolded near the “Balkan Hotel.”<sup>135</sup> Men from both groups were loaded onto buses and taken to the building of the Secretariat of the Interior (SUP), which served as a police station.<sup>136</sup> More individuals were also arrested later during summer in accordance with a previously designed list of specified intellectuals and prominent societal figures, who were, during this time “routinely taken to the Prijedor police station and beaten.”<sup>137</sup> All non-Serb men were subsequently taken by buses either to the Omarska camp or to the one in Keraterm, and women, children, and the elderly were mostly taken to the Trnopolje camp.<sup>138</sup> Despite the fact that plans for the creation of these camps already existed, with prisoners starting to arrive around 27 May, it was only on 31 May that Simo Drljača, the Chief of Police in Prijedor and a member of the Prijedor Crisis Staff, issued the official order for their establishment.<sup>139</sup>

### *Formation of opportunity*

In the previous chapter, it has been argued that the establishment of concentration camps was one of the most important structures that facilitated the perpetration of mass violence in Prijedor. There are numerous reasons for this. By their very nature, these camps fully delegitimize the victims’ claim to territory, socially marginalize them, deprive them of privacy, and render them completely vulnerable to often virtually any acts of violence.<sup>140</sup> Furthermore, the perpetrators act as omnipotent beings with absolute control over their victims.<sup>141</sup> As such, they also provide possible perpetrators with the opportunity to behave in a normally strictly prohibited way.<sup>142</sup> However, as demonstrated in the macro level chapter, once the state manages to shift moral norms and through its exercise of power and supposed legitimacy adopts a monopoly on violence, such behavior may suddenly become a desirable or even anticipated type of social action.<sup>143</sup> In respect to perpetrator opportunity, it is possible to identify, among

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<sup>134</sup> Kvočka et al.

<sup>135</sup> Kvočka et al., 6.

<sup>136</sup> Kvočka et al.

<sup>137</sup> Kvočka et al., 6.

<sup>138</sup> Kvočka et al.

<sup>139</sup> Kvočka et al., 7.

<sup>140</sup> Anderson, *Perpetrating Genocide*, 59-60.

<sup>141</sup> Anderson.

<sup>142</sup> Anderson.

<sup>143</sup> Gudehus, “Violence as Action.”

other things, four crucial factors that enable its manifestation; context, impunity, capability, and the victims' vulnerability.<sup>144</sup>

First, the context of violence provides a suitable legitimization for the perpetrators. Even if their individual motives differ from collective ones, their actions are still a part of a larger campaign of violence.<sup>145</sup> In Prijedor, non-Serbs were already identified as a threat to the state, which in turn justified their concentration and elimination in the eyes of the perpetrators. Apart from physical acts of violence, the context is also present in perpetrator discourse.<sup>146</sup> For instance, one witness testified that in Keraterm, an individual by the name of Zoran Žigić would often come to the camp to extort money from detainees, using terms such as “Turks” or “balijas” to refer to them.<sup>147</sup> Despite an apparent motive of self-enrichment and a likely satisfaction from committing violence, Žigić's actions were in line with the moral context established by the state.

Second, the essence of impunity lies in the absence of sanctions for otherwise heavily reprehensible acts of violence. In the context of state-orchestrated episodes of mass violence, the rule of law, while still functional, is subjected to the new order, thus largely excluding the possibility of holding perpetrators accountable.<sup>148</sup> Furthermore, the concentration camps themselves were established and largely operated by the very people who would be, in a normally functioning society, responsible for upholding the rule of law and protecting the citizens. For example, the Omarska Police Station was responsible for security services at the detention center.<sup>149</sup> Moreover, members of the public as well as state security services, together with military investigators, operated in a “mixed group” focused on interrogating the detainees.<sup>150</sup> Additionally, both the police and crime branches of the public security section as well as the state security section reported independently to the aforementioned Simo Drljača.<sup>151</sup> An interesting thing to point out, however, is that a perceived outside threat to this apparent perpetrator impunity can also be seen as a factor facilitating violence. At the end of July 1992, the camps became more internationally exposed, with humanitarian organizations seeking

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<sup>144</sup> Anderson.

<sup>145</sup> Anderson.

<sup>146</sup> Hinton, *Cambodia in the Shadow*, 285, 295.

<sup>147</sup> Prosecutor v. Duško Sikirica, Damir Došen and Dragan Kolundžija, IT-95-8-S, Sentencing Judgment, 29 (ICTY, November 13, 2001), <http://www.icty.org/x/cases/sikirica/tjug/en/sik-ts011113e.pdf>.

<sup>148</sup> Anderson, *Perpetrating Genocide*, 125.

<sup>149</sup> *Kvočka et al.*, IT-98-30/1-T, 11.

<sup>150</sup> *Kvočka et al.*, 10.

<sup>151</sup> *Kvočka et al.*, 11.

access to them, which in turn sparked an intensification in the routine killings occurring in Omarska.<sup>152</sup>

Third, the capability to commit such acts of violence is derived from a huge power differential between victims and perpetrators.<sup>153</sup> In respect to the camps, the Trial Chamber in the case of *Kvočka et al.* concluded that:

the non-Serbs detained in these camps were subjected to a series of atrocities and that the inhumane conditions were imposed as a means of degrading and subjugating them. Extreme brutality was systematic in the camps and utilized as a tool to terrorize the Muslims, Croats, and other non-Serbs imprisoned therein.<sup>154</sup>

Finally, victims' vulnerability is largely caused by their exposure to state power and their labeling as potentially desirable targets for violence.<sup>155</sup> The important thing is that the guards in the camp largely directly participated in the violence or at the very least did not interfere, which created an atmosphere of sheer terror, as for example in Keraterm, the victims of beatings "never reported the incidents because they were afraid of the guards."<sup>156</sup> Fear was omnipresent in the camps, as "guards and soldiers would come and go at the camp, regardless of the shift to which they were assigned."<sup>157</sup> In addition to this, a significant amount of violence occurred at the hands of individuals who would come from outside of the camp. In Keraterm, these "visitors came mostly at night, armed with guns, and they did so as they pleased."<sup>158</sup> As such, all of these factors and the prevalent camp conditions contributed to the victims' vulnerability also because they essentially eliminated any costs of perpetration, as the victims had no means of resisting and any significant punishment for abusing them was virtually absent.<sup>159</sup>

### *Opting for perpetration*

So far it has been established that several factors heavily fostered an environment in which perpetration became an acceptable or even desirable type of social action.<sup>160</sup> However, the

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<sup>152</sup> *Kvočka et al.*, 29.

<sup>153</sup> Anderson, *Perpetrating Genocide*, 125.

<sup>154</sup> *Kvočka et al.*, IT-98-30/1-T, 36.

<sup>155</sup> Anderson, *Perpetrating Genocide*, 126.

<sup>156</sup> *Sikirica et al.*, IT-95-8-S, 26.

<sup>157</sup> *Sikirica et al.*, 27.

<sup>158</sup> *Sikirica et al.*, 29.

<sup>159</sup> Anderson, *Perpetrating Genocide*, 126-127.

<sup>160</sup> Gudehus, "Violence as Action."



environment is in this case only one part of the equation, and as such it does not directly produce perpetration just by itself. Instead, it is a factor that heavily influences the range of options that a possible perpetrator might perceive, yet the act itself still requires the individual decision to opt for perpetration.<sup>161</sup> Anderson argues that “in a sense, every decision we make is the product of how we, as distinct individuals, respond to our environment.”<sup>162</sup> In the camps, not every individual on the side of the perpetrators engaged directly in committing violence. This of course does not mean that an individual cannot be profiled as a perpetrator if they did not physically participate in the beating, killing, and rape, as even the decision not to act might constitute a type of perpetration.<sup>163</sup> There were several instances, however, of various camp guards treating detainees differently, allowing them to, for example, occasionally receive food from the outside.<sup>164</sup> All of this then points to an essential variable in understanding perpetration; the role of individual will. Another important thing to note is the meaning of the word action. In this context, it refers to a continuous process of an individual’s positioning and repositioning in relation to their environment, as the environment itself does not determine their behavior.<sup>165</sup> Considering the immediate context of perpetration, a theme that is often brought up, and that often possesses a significant degree of analytical value, is the presence of authority figures and a demand for obedience, especially in organizations with a clearly defined hierarchy, such as the military or the police.<sup>166</sup> However, the ultimate argument presented in this section is that even though the concentration camps constituted a textbook example of environment that provided individuals with the possibility to perpetrate, obedience to norms did not appear to play a significant role. Instead, the empirical evidence seems to be pointing towards a chaotic environment in which the decision to commit violence was not necessarily determined by structural factors.

In most cases, perpetrators are rational, which means that they base their actions upon the information available to them and their rationality is embedded in power structures.<sup>167</sup> In the context of mass violence, individuals will assess their action alternatives based on their perception of risks and incentives.<sup>168</sup> The previously mentioned obedience might be a factor that influences this perception, as not participating in violence might result in a threat posed to

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<sup>161</sup> Anderson, *Perpetrating Genocide*, 128-130.

<sup>162</sup> Anderson, 128.

<sup>163</sup> Anderson, 111-116.

<sup>164</sup> *Sikirica et al.*, IT-95-8-S, 21.

<sup>165</sup> Gudehus, “Violence as Action,” 44.

<sup>166</sup> Anderson, *Perpetrating Genocide*, 133-136; Hinton, *Cambodia in the Shadow*, 277-280.

<sup>167</sup> Anderson, *Perpetrating Genocide*, 138.

<sup>168</sup> Anderson.

the individual, for example in the form of punishment from a superior officer.<sup>169</sup> The context of mass violence in Prijedor, predominantly based on propaganda and institutional norms, created perpetrator opportunity within the camps that offered great incentives, such as personal enrichment or a satisfaction from committing violence. The incentives likewise seemed to have been fostered by a notion of omnipotence, when even some higher officials would commit violence. On one particular occasion, Željko Mejakić, the head of security and de facto commander of the Omarska camp, greeted two female detainees upon their arrival at the camp with the words: “what are we going to do with these two whores? Why are they here? We ought to kill them.”<sup>170</sup> At other times, violence appeared almost ritualistic in its brutality. On Petrovdan (St. Peter’s Day), which is an Orthodox religious festival taking place on 12 July each year, the Serbs had a “rally of civilians and guards,” during which they would take people out of their rooms to burn them alive.<sup>171</sup> A witness testified that:

I remember that, and I’ll remember it for the rest of my life, the cries of women who were outside or in the first room. I’ll never forget their cries and screams. Then I smelt the stench of burning meat. You know when meat begins to burn, it has a specific smell and this smell of burning flesh was mixed with the smell of the burning rubber from the tyres.<sup>172</sup>

However, the risks appeared to be quite low, which means that individuals did not have to participate and had a larger range of action alternatives available to them. Instead, there appeared to be a great degree of voluntary perpetration present in the camp. It appears that there were even incidents during which certain individuals had to be stopped from engaging in violence. In Omarska, an “intervention platoon,” that was not included in Drljača’s order, arrived in early June from the Banja Luka Security Services Centre.<sup>173</sup> The group stayed there for a week, after which it was replaced by another one.<sup>174</sup> It is stated that: “the commanders of these two groups, Maric and Strazivuk, were apparently unable or unwilling to control the men under their command.”<sup>175</sup>

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<sup>169</sup> Anderson, 133-136.

<sup>170</sup> *Kvočka et al.*, IT-98-30/1-T, 17.

<sup>171</sup> *Kvočka et al.*, 30.

<sup>172</sup> *Kvočka et al.*, 30.

<sup>173</sup> *Kvočka et al.*, 13.

<sup>174</sup> *Kvočka et al.*,

<sup>175</sup> *Kvočka et al.*, 13.

In essence, the combination of horrific violence and incredibly harsh conditions created a world of lawlessness for the detainees. A witness testified that the guards would beat people at random, while often being drunk.<sup>176</sup> This created an atmosphere that occasionally even drove the victims insane, as testified by another witness who recalled a fellow inmate standing up in the eating hall saying he could not take it anymore, only to be “shot dead in a burst of gunfire that also wounded three others.”<sup>177</sup> Guards could have done as they pleased, and outsiders would likewise come to the camps to rape, torture, and kill.<sup>178</sup> However, it is not possible to say that these acts were determined by certain factors, as such theory would fail to account for situations such as when “a guard prevented other guards at the white house from assaulting the two female detainees.”<sup>179</sup> Furthermore, in the case of Keraterm, conditions would sometimes slightly improve under certain shift commanders.<sup>180</sup> The case was also similar with Damir Došen, a shift leader at Keraterm, who at occasion ordered a visitor to stop with a beating.<sup>181</sup> Nevertheless, in the Sentencing Judgment in the case of Sikirica et al., it is stated that two of the visitors who would often come to the camp, among them the previously mentioned Žigić, “did not follow anyone’s orders and did what they wanted.”<sup>182</sup> As such, evidence presented in these documents supports the argument that the camps provided individual perpetrators with the opportunity to commit grave crimes over and over again without any significant repercussions, which in turn shaped the perpetrators’ view of the types of action available to them. They could have done, and mostly did, just as they pleased. It is nearly impossible to uncover the precise motivations behind these individuals’ actions, yet through an analysis of their surrounding environment it is possible to at least partly illustrate the factors that might have shaped the perpetrators’ reasoning.

#### *Agency as a deciding factor*

So far, the argument has been established that even though various factors on different levels of the conflict greatly facilitated the escalation of violence and provided individuals with the incentive to actually perpetrate violence as well as contextually justify it, they do not as such determine a given person’s behavior. While this thesis acknowledges the importance of context, and that circumstances at times of mass violence are incredibly complex, which renders the

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<sup>176</sup> *Kvočka et al.*, 92.

<sup>177</sup> *Kvočka et al.*, 28.

<sup>178</sup> *Sikirica et al.*, IT-95-8-S, 29.

<sup>179</sup> *Kvočka et al.*, IT-98-30/1-T, 32.

<sup>180</sup> *Sikirica et al.*, IT-95-8-S, 20-21.

<sup>181</sup> *Sikirica et al.*, 29.

<sup>182</sup> *Sikirica et al.*, 29.

possibility to take into account every single variable that influences individual decision-making and reasoning virtually impossible, the ultimate argument that is put forth is that agency constitutes a deciding factor. In order to substantiate this claim, this inquiry discusses, apart from the concentration camps, the mass murder of around 200 civilians at Korićanske Stijene on 21 August 1992. On this day, a convoy had been organized to transport non-Serb civilians from Tukovi and the Trnopolje camp towards the municipality of Travnik.<sup>183</sup> The buses stopped along the road, the men were separated from the women and children and loaded onto two other buses, and taken to Korićanske Stijene, where they were subsequently shot and killed above a deep ravine, which resulted in the death of all but twelve of these men.<sup>184</sup> One of the men who participated in this massacre was Darko Mrđa, a member of the Prijedor Police “Intervention Squad.”<sup>185</sup> During his trial, the Defense argued that “Mrđa acted under the duress of his superiors’ orders and that, if he had not carried them out, he would have suffered ‘serious consequences.’”<sup>186</sup> Furthermore, the Defense emphasized that Mrđa had been subjected to “constant anti-Muslim brainwashing and hate propaganda of his superiors.”<sup>187</sup> The essence of these claims was that Mrđa, as a person of young age and low rank, “could not have opposed the orders he received.”<sup>188</sup> Such things would then surely point away from agency, signaling that in the case of Mrđa, it had been overridden by outside factors such as threats and ideology.

However, the Trial Chamber in this case rejected the claims that Mrđa acted under threat, as there was “no evidence that the orders were accompanied by threats causing duress.”<sup>189</sup> Mrđa likewise knew that a systematic attack on civilians was taking place, yet he “personally participated in the selection of the civilians who were going to be killed and in their subsequent murder and attempted murder.”<sup>190</sup> The Chamber likewise stated that “the orders were so manifestly unlawful that Darko Mrđa must have been well aware that they violated the most elementary laws of war and the basic dictates of humanity.”<sup>191</sup> Therefore, from a theoretical perspective, this thesis claims that the risks of not participating in this act were relatively low, while the incentive to stop was most likely of high degree, as the victims were

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<sup>183</sup> Prosecutor v. Darko Mrđa, IT-02-59-S, Sentencing Judgment, 3 (ICTY, March 31, 2004),

<http://www.icty.org/x/cases/mrda/tjug/en/sj-040331.pdf>.

<sup>184</sup> *Mrđa*, IT-02-59-S.

<sup>185</sup> *Mrđa*, 3.

<sup>186</sup> *Mrđa*, 14.

<sup>187</sup> *Mrđa*, 14.

<sup>188</sup> *Mrđa*, 16.

<sup>189</sup> *Mrđa*, 17.

<sup>190</sup> *Mrđa*, 9.

<sup>191</sup> *Mrđa*, 17.

helpless, unarmed, and weakened from months of imprisonment.<sup>192</sup> In addition to this, “the policemen at the top of the cliff threw hand grenades and fired their guns at the wounded men when they saw any movement or heard any cries,” while “the dying men were heard moaning for a long time.”<sup>193</sup> Such evidence clearly points to an act of grave brutality during which, however, the threat of opting out of participation seemed to have been relatively low. The fact that Mrđa consciously participated in this mass murder despite these factors leads the author to argue that in the end, agency constituted an undeniably determinative factor in respect to decision-making. In light of these statements the role of ideology undoubtedly serves as a factor that influences individual perception of risks and incentives, yet it depends on an individual’s self-affiliation with it.<sup>194</sup> In other words, on the micro level its impact depends on how an individual responds to it and integrates it into their own perception of the environment.

### *Assessment*

All things considered, the argument presented in this chapter is that the context created by the norms and structures discussed in the previous two chapters formed an environment that provided individuals with the opportunity to perpetrate violence with considerably low risks. However, punishment for opting out of perpetration likewise seemed to have been relatively absent in this environment. Therefore, the ultimate variable that influenced decision making was individual agency. The claim has been presented that most perpetrators are rational, assessing their action alternatives based on the options available to them. In the case of the concentration camps and the mass murder, this would mean that if individuals chose to commit violence, they did so through a conscious choice. All of this then confirms the initial hypothesis of this inquiry that contextual factors greatly influence yet do not determine individual action.

### **Conclusion**

By conducting a multi-level analysis this thesis presents several key arguments in respect to the factors that facilitated the perpetration of mass violence in Prijedor. Coming back to the original hypothesis, this inquiry established the case that the actual acts of perpetration must be understood in connection with the environmental factors that surrounded the perpetrators, yet these factors cannot be seen as completely determinative in their nature. This has been argued through the analysis of three different yet intertwined levels of the committed violence.

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<sup>192</sup> *Mrđa*, 12.

<sup>193</sup> *Mrđa*, 10.

<sup>194</sup> Maynard, “Theorizing Ideological Diversity in Mass Violence,” 58–79.

First, the emergence of the context of mass violence has been explained through strain theory and propaganda in the macro level chapter. As the Bosnian Serbs wished to remain a part of Yugoslavia during the political and societal upheaval of the 1990s, their prevention from doing so and a loss of group power contributed to a collective strain, which was subsequently exploited by, among others, people such as Radovan Karadžić, Biljana Plavšić, and Momčilo Krajišnik, who could be seen as so-called visionaries in this period. Through their political efforts and propaganda, the Bosnian Serb leadership presented itself as restoring order to the society, while adopting a survivalist discourse that clearly identified the supposed source of the Serb's trouble; the Bosnian Muslims. Strong Serb propaganda then contributed to the creation of a humanity gap, a social distance formed between perpetrators and victims, as the state managed to revise collective moral rules and slowly adopt a monopoly on violence. Various forms of propaganda stressed the glory of the Serbian nation, which now had to arm itself against the Muslims and Croats, so that history would not repeat itself. Through their efforts the Bosnian Serb leadership managed to shift societal moral norms, reduced the future victims' identity to a mere collective label, and created an environment in which violence committed against the enemies of the state became a desirable type of social action. All of this then contributed to the implementation of a large-scale policy of ethnic cleansing throughout the territory of Republika Srpska.

Second, on the meso level the case has been established that after the takeover of power in Prijedor, the SDS authorities presented their leadership as a source of continuity and further reinforced the notions of distrust among the citizens, widening the gap between Serbs and non-Serbs. Through an analysis of the case of Milomir Stakić, who became the President of the Crisis Staff which took over the role of the Municipal Assembly, it has been demonstrated how the SDS institutionalized violence by organizing the population along the enforced norms of obedience, conformity, and urgency. The SDS structurally promoted violence through the legal system, which effectively removed non-Serb individuals from virtually all positions in society, as well as through a compartmentalization of different bodies of authority, the use of violence specialists such as the military and the police, and by establishing the concentration camps of Omarska, Keraterm, and Trnopolje, which would serve as detention facilities for non-Serbs. By effectively exercising political control and by controlling different bodies of authority, Stakić and others ultimately directed the perpetration of violence against the non-Serb population.

Finally, all of these factors then formed the necessary context for the perpetration of violence on the micro level, which enabled individual perpetrators to exercise their agency in

accordance with the socially established norms. In this context, risks for committing violence were virtually absent during the summer months of 1992, while providing individuals with numerous incentives to engage in violent acts against the non-Serbs. However, this does not mean that the micro level perpetration can be explained solely through these factors, as the risks of opting out of perpetration likewise seemed to have been relatively low. As such, the argument presented here is that in the cases discussed here, being the concentration camps of Omarska, Keraterm, and Trnopolje, and the mass murder of civilians at Korićanske Stijene, it was ultimately up to the individuals to position themselves either against or in line with the factors that promoted violence, thus signaling the undeniable role of individual agency in respect to perpetration.

In essence, the aim of this thesis was to establish a case of how the violence in Prijedor might be explained through various theories on different levels, ultimately pointing at the dynamics of social action and individual reasoning within a context of mass violence. Nevertheless, there are numerous limitations regarding this inquiry, with the most significant one being connected to the primary sources. Even though the author focused on overcoming their limitations through thorough analysis and theoretical insight, the information that the sources yielded was bound to the Tribunal's aim of determining individual criminal responsibility on a factual basis. For example, in the case of Darko Mrđa, the Trial Chamber dismissed the claims regarding threat and duress due to a lack of factual evidence. However, for the purpose of understanding individual reasoning, such conclusion simply is not enough. The final argument of this thesis regarding individual agency is then necessarily influenced by the very sources on which it is based, and the author acknowledges that a different conclusion might have been reached if sources such as individual interviews were to be employed, for greater room could be given to the analysis of the perpetrators' reasoning from their own viewpoint. Nevertheless, the sources still contained a considerable degree of essential information which made it possible to claim with a considerable degree of credibility that most of the micro level perpetration analyzed here was voluntary, which is a vital argument by itself. With these limitations in mind this thesis therefore encourages further research into the realm of perpetration on the basis of fieldwork and interviews, which might undoubtedly produce fruitful results from a different perspective. Through an analysis of the interplay of the incredibly complex factors it is possible to further societal as well as academic understanding of perpetration dynamics. No single nation or ethnic group has a monopoly on violence. Violence is an inherent facet of humanity, and

only through the understanding of its complexity may societies act to prevent it from occurring in the future.

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