

Bystanders in the Bosnian War in the 1990s

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Introduction

Historiography and other disciplines in the social sciences, especially psychology, have undergone a process of maturation, through which a better understanding of the Holocaust and genocide has been attained. The concept of bystanders put an end to the dichotomous dimension of history writing about perpetrators versus victims.¹ As a result of this conceptual novum a new perspective on the Holocaust and the processual character of the atrocities against the Jews has been developed.

The category of bystanders has been identified and approached on different levels: national, organizational (e. g. Church)², and individual. Within those levels, different definitions of bystanders have been given. Thus, in his pioneering work on bystanders, in a phenomenological descriptive manner Hilberg introduced three subgroups of bystanders, which he defined according to their relationship to the victims, i. e. helpers, gainers, and onlookers³. While the onlookers are characterized as essentially passive witnesses to mass murder, who may or may not have supported the killings, the *helpers* and gainers took a more active part in the process, either through direct intervention, or by enjoying the fruits of oppression by taking over vacated flats or other stolen property⁴. Thus, the profilation as bystanders implies different types and scales of (in)action endowed with different degrees of moralization which has been immanent to the literature so far.

A more general approach to bystander –behaviour, which tries to exceed the Holocaust context by integrating bystander behaviour in everyday situations under peaceful circumstances has been offered by Bar-On. The author distinguishes bystanders according to their situational positions and provides categories like eyewitnesses, distant listeners, etc. Another criterion of categorization represents the bystanders' exposure to the victimization process, as well as the hierarchical nature of social order, which contextualizes bystanders. As a result of this more subtle classification Bar-On introduces several categories focusing on the onlookers and defined by their motives,

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

How ambiguous and fluid the concept of bystanders is (like all other categorizations concerning human or group behaviour) has been shown by recent research conducted on states which have been officially presented and praised as

¹ Michael Marrus published in 1987 a book where he discussed the Allies, neutral powers, the Vatican and the Jews of the free world under the title “Bystanders”.

² For a very detailed analysis on the role of the church see, Viktoria Barnett 2000.

³ Hilberg, 1992.

⁴ Hilberg cited in, Tomislav Dulic, 2005, p. 360.

being neutral but turned out to be at least economically involved in the events and therefore facilitated the destruction process⁵.

Still, most researchers seem to conclude unisono that bystanders played a crucial role in the Holocaust and often raise some moral issues pointing to the bystanders' (in)direct contribution to the development of the atrocities against the Jews in World War II. On the other hand, many authors, often departing from a historical perspective and the Holocaust (among them especially Ervin Staub), have tried to reflect on the bystanders' role in future conflicts by emphasizing their potential in preventing or halting group violence⁶.

Very important question, thus, which still seeks an answer, is to what extent the concept of bystanders which has been discussed mainly in the context of the Holocaust can be analogically utilized in other cases of genocide and group violence. Is the concept of bystanders generally applicable to conflict constellations and which contextual preconditions does it require?

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

Initially, it was planned to give an overview of research on bystanders in the Balkans for the project *Spelar roll*, inaugurated by *Forum För Levande Historia*. However, since serious research on this issue has not been done so far I will include not only secondary (research) literature but also primary sources about the war in order to discuss the aspect of bystanders.

After the first part of the paper, where a short overview of the major atrocities committed in Bosnia and Herzegovina will be presented, I will try to show to what extent and on which level the bystander concept may be applied in this case. Which states have been considered as bystanders? Which organizations have been labelled bystanders? Who writes about bystanders in Bosnia and Herzegovina? And, finally, can we employ the term bystanders in this context at all? The questions imply the request for a qualitative differentiation of (quasi) research which has been conducted in this field in regard to its provenance, intent of legitimation, etc. I shall try to present local as well as foreign publications on the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina and will introduce personal accounts given in diaries or interviews which can provide us with an insight into everyday life under war conditions and the bystander-like behaviour which is shaped and explained on the individual level.

Atrocities in Bosnia and Herzegovina

The nature of the conflict in Bosnia and Herzegovina has been from the outset a subject of conflicting interpretations. From one perspective, the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina could be viewed as a clear cut case of civil war, i. e. internal war among groups unable to agree on arrangements for sharing power. Some of the parties in this civil war enjoyed substantial political and military backing from neighbouring states. In contrast to this definition, the international decision to recognize the independence of Bosnia and Herzegovina provided for the opposing side, a basis for defining the war as a case of external aggression by both Serbia and Croatia⁷.

⁵ Cesarini & Levine, p. 4.

⁶ Staub, 2000, pp. 367-382.

⁷ See, Burg & Shoup, p. 201.

Nevertheless, the conflict resulted in the first large-scale military conflict in Europe since 1945 with numerous massacres, among which the best known is the massacre in Srebrenica in July 1995. Atrocities have been committed against each of the three ethnic groups as such, however, not with the aim to exterminate them but to expel from certain parts of the country in order to create ethnically purified regions of Bosnia and Herzegovina⁸. This made the war in Bosnia a mosaic of conflicts which ethnical constellations varied on the regional level. Depending on the ethnic group which, dominated in a territory brutal campaigns of ethnic cleansing were initiated mostly against Muslims, but also against Croats and Serbs.

Most reported atrocities which initially awakened concern were the shellings in Sarajevo heightened by the shelling of a breadline in Markale in Sarajevo on May 27 that killed scores of civilians⁹. Two more massacres gained great attention by the Western media, i. e. the Markala market place massacre of February 5, 1994 and the second shelling of the same location on August 28, 1995. Followed by extensive shelling as well as sniping from surrounding hills where even 1000 shells a day fell on the city, the Sarajevans were exposed to continuous attacks which lasted until the end of war. Although not reported by the Western media, in summer 1993 massacres were committed against Sarajevo Serbs mostly by Muslim paramilitary forces, which have also shown the recently discovered mass graves of Serbs.

Regarding the regions outside Sarajevo, most of the massacres took place were shorter in duration and were restricted only to certain parts of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Although it is not possible to count all of them we will cite only a few which can be characteristic in the wave of ethnic cleansing.

Kozarac and the whole eastern Bosnia region serves as an example of first climaxed ethnic cleansing in which several Muslim villages (in the Prijedor region) were surrounded and shelled, and a sizable number of their inhabitants massacred¹⁰. The ethnic cleansing waves in this region were mainly carried out by local militia and SDS activists accompanied by Serbian paramilitary forces. Most women and children were spared incarceration and death, but were totally at the mercy of their tormentors. Many women, as will be noted later, became victims of rape. Refugees trying to escape fighting ran the risk of being shelled. Men and boys on the other hand, were interned and many were killed outright, either upon capture or during incarceration. The Prijedor region for example is well known by the Serb-held detention camps, one of them also Keraterm with a total number of 1000-1400 prisoners¹¹. In The Hague Tribunal the internation in Keraterm was extensively analysed and documented in the Sikirica case¹². Some other regions known for massacres was Northern Herzegovina, according to some reports available, where brutal ethnic cleansing of Muslims has been conducted by Serbian paramilitaries. The Serb campaign of ethnic cleansing established a pattern that was to be followed on other occasions and by other groups, however not on the same scale.

Thus, Serbian people became victims especially in the region of Odzak and Posavina where they got expelled (many of them also slaughtered) by Croatian forces. In May 1992 Serbs became victims of slaughter in a part of Sarajevo called Pofalici. However, those who experienced persecution and torture have testified and reported also help which they received from their Muslim friends and neighbours.

⁸ Magnusson, p. 53.

⁹ Bougarel, p. 33.

¹⁰ Burg & Shoup, p. 173.

¹¹ Magnusson, p. 64.

¹² For a detailed discussion of the ICTY and the Sikirica case, see Magnusson, pp. 63-67.

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

Nonetheless, Srebrenica is most prominent region which is mostly connected to the massacre in summer 1995. Antecedent to this event were other massacres carried out by Serbs and Muslims, though smaller in scale, were taking place in Srebrenica. Those, however, were not considered worth any media attention.

In Srebrenica and the wider region most brutally fought contests were taking place. However, the culmination of the atrocities has been identified with the massacre which was taking place towards the end of events in Srebrenica. Between 14 and 17 July 1995 Bosniak and soldiers and civilians, i. e. unarmed Muslim men and boys seeking to escape Srebrenica were executed by Serbian soldiers. The total number of victims, although not yet ascertained, is according to the ICTY somewhere between 7 000 ad 8 000 individuals. While the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina, as such, has clearly not been defined as genocide, the case of Srebrenica does constitute a case of genocide, according to the ICTY. This definition of a single local case within the war has been advocated by prof. Bassiouni in his final report¹³ who claimed that a genocide may be committed on the local level. His argumentation is the following

The question of genocide is a little more complicated because of the way the convention is drafted in terms of requiring a specific intent in the way it was carried out, and as to whether or not the convention is to be interpreted as encompassing an entire group.

We at the Commission took a more progressive look at it and said that genocide should be interpreted not in light of an entire group, as was the interpretation that followed the Holocaust because that was the pattern that was taken by the Nazis, but rather to look at it in terms of more specific contexts. So that if you took, for example, the context of Prijedor, where 56,000 Bosnians are missing and a large number of them were killed, particularly the intellectual elite, the leadership, et cetera—if you took that context, that is, the Prijedor context, then you can find an intent to eliminate in whole or in part a particular group within that context.¹⁴

Regarding total death tolls, several figures have been already estimated. The figure of 250 000 deaths which has been often employed by Muslim politicians and intellectuals¹⁵ is proven to be clearly exaggerated. The Norwegian financed independent *Research and Documentation Centre* in Bosnia and Herzegovina led by Mirsad Tokaca¹⁶ that investigates the death tolls in of the Bosnian war estimated the number of the killed around 94 000¹⁷. These victims belong to all national groups in Bosnia, and a large proportion was soldiers with 59%. Total population loss is estimated at about 2 %¹⁸.

Bystanders in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Local Research

The application of the bystander concept in Bosnia is somewhat problematic. Only scarce examples of research on this issue can be found, and local literature on

¹³ About critical reflection on that report and its inventive definition of local genocide see, Kjell Magnusson, pp. 59-60.

¹⁴ Bassiouni, M. Cherif. 1995. "Genocide in Bosnia-Herzegovina.", cited in Magnusson, p. 74.

¹⁵ Imamovic, p. 11.

¹⁶ See <http://www.idc.org.ba/aboutus.html>

¹⁷ This number was given by Mirsad Tokaca in his last interview for *Dani* nr. 524, June 2007.

¹⁸ Magnusson, p. 58.

the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina has mainly been determined by nationalist driven interpretations in which the dichotomy victim versus perpetrator is oversimplified and runs along ethnic lines without any regard of bystanders.

To begin with the Bosniak side, authors mainly characterize the war as a case of aggression against an internationally recognized state, which resulted in genocide against the Bosniaks. The aggressors are always identified with the nationalist militia from Serbia and elements of the Yugoslav army, working in alliance with local Serbs¹⁹. Following this premise, Smail Čekić, for example, has documented, in great detail, preparations by the SDS and the JNA for war in Bosnia, ranging from arming the Serb population to relocation of military depots. He concludes that the conflict in Bosnia and Herzegovina during the 1990s was a result of Serb aggression, in which a carefully planned and well organized genocide was committed against the Bosniaks²⁰. Mustafa Imamovic, a professor of national history at the Faculty of law in Sarajevo, gave the definition of genocide committed by Serbs upon the Muslims/Bosniaks an even more historical and enduring character, by stating that the extermination of Muslims by Serbs has been going on for centuries and got repeated for several times. According to this account the war in the 1990s represents the 9th genocide against Bosnian Muslims²¹. Thus, Serb aggression, not- civil war, coupled with genocide are the main foci of the Bosniak narrative.

In contrast, the Serbian interpretation and writing on the war is built on the argument that since the Ottoman times Serbs have been victims of genocide committed by the Muslims. Regarding the war during the 1990s they were just protecting their national rights in order to prevent another genocide, while Serbia became a victim of NATO and «terrorist attacks» in Kosovo²².

The same style of narration is also found in Croatian nationalist writings arguing that the Croats have been the greatest victims of atrocities which the Serbs committed against them, emphasizing also the war in Croatia as a result of Serbian aggression.

As a consequence, each ethnic group perceives itself as a victim of the war, creating a strategy of victimization. This ideologically distorted writing has to be understood in the framework of a still ongoing process of nation- and state-building. Adding the fact, that the charge of genocide often implies demands that the alleged perpetrator be punished not only for the alleged acts of genocide but for all actions surrounding the genocide, this way of spelling events is instrumentalized, obscuring one's own atrocities. Additionally, as Kecmanovic notes, the praxis of perceiving oneself as a victim provides the group with moral and material right to reprisal and promises to be the first one to be offered assistance²³. Especially Bosniak politicians and intellectuals tend to employ the discourse of victims of genocide in order, one could argue, to legitimize the creation of a Bosniak nation state.

Consequently, a research which still serves nationalist ideologies and nation-state aspirations provides little room for a concept of bystanders. Actually, in a historiography which still sticks to already obsolete methods of simple registering of events, innovative concepts like bystanders seem to be an unknown and alien concept.

¹⁹ Burg & Shoup, p. 194.

²⁰ Cekic, 1994.

²¹ Mustafa Imamovic, p. 18.

²² Drakulic, p. 10.

²³ Kecmanovic, p. 54.

Western Media, Academia, and Iustitia: Bystanders Messengers, the Policymakers, and Serbia

Concrete and separate research on bystanders in Bosnia and Herzegovina has so far not been undertaken and the scarce literature where bystanders are mentioned often does not qualify as research. The first references to bystanders in the Bosnian war derived from bystanders, i. e. international journalists who were reporting from and about war zones in the country during the 1990s. With the intention to bring dire news of the war to the outside world, Western journalists entered the war zone as immediate observers of the happenings. Their physical co-presence to the events made them, one could argue, take over the role of professional bystander messengers²⁴, about whom Hilberg has written. In their bystanders by assignment-behaviour the journalists' main attempt was to deliver information to the «distant» world, i. e. mainly the Western world about the atrocities. Without the possibility to halt the violence about which they were reporting, the journalists very soon pointed to Western governments accusing them of being passive bystanders to the war. However, blaming someone for being bystander implied automatically ascribing to the reported events a genocidal character since the discourse about bystanders is related to genocide. Exactly this logic was determining the form of narratives which soon were employed.

One of the pioneering journalists who began to inform the U.S. media in this manner was, the Pulitzer Prize winner, Roy Gutman. The content of his articles, which were published in the American newspapers *New York Newsday* and *Washington Post* focused mainly on the events in north-western Bosnia in the spring and summer of 1992. Being praised for having discovered the existence of Serb-held detention camps Roy Gutman very soon found a motive which was to act as a makeshift for a portrait of genocide making himself and the Western world a testimony to this event. His articles, which he published in a compendium called «Witness to genocide» were mainly determined by subjectively limited impressions and stories of former Muslim inmates from the Prijedor region reporting about horrifying killings, rapes, torture. Making the self-representation of survivors a testimony and giving voice only to one ethnic group of victims soon resulted in an over-simplified picture in which bad Serbs were carrying out genocide against Muslims. Moreover, by drawing pictures of emaciated men and deportations by train from Bosnia a clear parallel to the Holocaust and Auschwitz was invoked. The analogy with Nazi Germany immanently carried a clear message to Western policy makers: you have inflicted evil upon yourselves by remaining passive bystanders! Your intervention to prevent genocide is needed!²⁵.

Thus, by going beyond the role of a mere empathizing outsider, Gutman turned into a transmitter of controlled information serving only one side, i. e. the Muslim. In other words, the initial course of defining bystanders, very soon turned to an instrumentalized tool for transmitting only a certain impression of the war. Moreover, the emotional nature of the Western journalists' attachment to the Muslim cause led some journalists to dispute vigorously interpretations and reports inconsistent with the story line following the Muslim strategy of victimization²⁶.

Additionally, making use of the new media possibilities in the age of television, filmed interviews appeared again focusing on Muslims being expelled

²⁴ Hilberg introduced this category of bystander messenger, see Hilberg, pp. 217-224.

²⁵ Gutman, pp. 42-44.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p.38.

from their homes while Serbs were embodied only by the Serbian aggressor. As a result of this media climate a static view of the war was created with a tight frame of interpretation showing a certain group always as the victim while the others are always the perpetrators.

As one example from this discourse can serve the *New York Times*, 9 March 1995, written by the journalist Roger Cohen:

«The [CIA] report makes nonsense of the view – now consistently put forward by Western European governments and intermittently by the Clinton Administration—that the Bosnian conflict is a civil war for which guilt should be divided between Serbs, Croats and Muslims rather than a case of Serbian aggression. To those who think there are parties are equally guilty, this report is pretty devastating, one official said. The scale of what the Serbs did is of a different order. But more than that, it makes clear, with concrete evidence, that there was a conscious, coherent, and systematic Serbian policy to get rid of Muslims through murders, torture and imprisonment.»²⁷

Burg and Shoup have argued that most of the journalists were actually lacking necessary training to understand the events. Therefore, as they correctly emphasize, Western media in most cases fell a pray to manipulation mainly of the Bosnian government²⁸ and became the messengers of a monovocally designed delineation of the events. Thus, the close external bystander role turned to be a communication device repeatedly accusing the UN and Western policy makers of failing to end the genocide taking place in Bosnia.

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

Interestingly, as Nik Gowing suggests, the United States and the UN, among others, had knowledge of the existence of the camps as early as- June, and policy makers at higher levels were apparently engaged in heated internal debates about the information²⁹. The detention camps were also incorporated into the reports of humanitarian organizations and the findings of the Special Rapporteur of the UN Commission on Human Rights, Tadeuzs Mazowiecki, who suggested the concentration of the Serb heavy weapons, disarmament of irregulars and broadening of the UN mandate³⁰. Those steps, however, were never taken.

Actually, this bystander mediator discourse of international journalists within the war zones, the main attempt of which was to create an awareness of Western passive bystander behaviour, hardly succeeded in mobilizing the West. Moreover, this discourse even failed to generate popular enthusiasm for involvement. In his research about popular perception of the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Nick Gowing concludes, that the U. S. public, although concerned about Bosnia and supportive of ending ethnic cleansing and the war, tended not to support any direct involvement of U. S. ground forces³¹. Moreover, the public opposed the use of air strikes against the Serbs throughout spring 1993³². According to the study of the «Mirror Center for the People and the Press» published in November 1993, the American public did not even view the war in Bosnia as a matter of high priority for the United States. It ranked

²⁷ Cited in, Vetlesen, 1998, p. 7.

²⁸ Gowing, p. 38.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 175.

³⁰ «Human Rights Situation and Reports of the Special Reporters and Representatives: Situation of Human Rights on the Territory of the Former Yugoslavia, “ UN General Assembly and Security Council document, A/47/666-S/24809 (November 17, 1992), p. 38, cited in Burg & Shoup, p. 174.

³¹ Gowing, p. 38.

³² Burg & Shoup, p. 163.

well behind «strengthening the domestic economy», stopping the flood of illegal aliens», protecting the global environment and other issues in importance³³. In other words, while media coverage of developments in Bosnia placed great pressure on Western policy makers to act, popular opinion did not so. A similar lack of media influence on the policy makers has been documented by Gowing. Indeed, his interviews with individuals concerned with U. S. policymaking in the period of 1992 underscore the fact that government intelligence sources actually provided policymakers with information about unseen developments long in advance of the media³⁴. This information, however, seemed not to be a sufficient motivator to intervene as soon as the media wanted the West to do. Similar studies about European public opinion about the war in Bosnia has not been done so far. Thus, analyzing similarities and differences between those two Western public spheres still remains a task of future research.

As the analysis of Kuusisto has shown, in contrast to the media coverage, which employed the discourse of genocide political discourse shaped in the West diagnosed the events in Bosnia and Herzegovina as irrational, bewildered, and senseless. This discursive way of framing and associating the Bosnian war with metaphors of nightmares, natural catastrophes, morasses, created a legitimizing logic of foreign policy according to which any involvement was not advisable or even possible. In a conflict driven by irrational acts, as was often stated, the best behaviour was to be a passive bystander, onlooker. Any intervention according to the rationale of Bosnian metaphors would resemble Don Quixote behaviour of tilting at windmills, shadows and ghosts³⁵. Explaining that «...it is inter-ethnic conflict, it is massively mixed up...It is going to take time. And that is tragic, and it is horrible... It is difficult to explain, but this war is irrational. There is no rationality at all about ethnic conflict. (Eagleburger, 28 August 1992)»³⁶ the political discourse repeatedly asserted that delivering humanitarian aid, watching over the no-fly zones and offering negotiation opportunities without intervention was the possible plan for a third party to adopt in Bosnia³⁷.

To conclude, two main discourses in relation to the bystander role during the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina were presented in non academic settings and stood in conflicting relations to each other. While media discourse deriving from the war zones was charging the passive bystander behaviour of the Western powers with immorality and lack of responsibility towards Muslim civilians being victims of genocide, Western political discourse shaped outside the war zones considered the passive standing-by-behaviour as the only option in a war defined by irrationality. Both discourses and analysis identified the bystanders outside Bosnia and Herzegovina. Thus, employing Staub's classification, both concentrated on external bystanders which they identified on the state-level with Western policy makers and the USA. Given the fact that Kuusisto's analysis focuses on the political discourse during 1992, i. e. before US policy intervened militarily, no discussion of bystanders is given in relation to the change of the war dynamics.

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

³³ Cited in Burg & Shoup, p. 163.

³⁴ Gowing, p. 54.

³⁵ Kuusisto, p. 611.

³⁶ Cited in Kuusisto, p. 610.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 611.

one has to differentiate qualitatively the research which has been done so far. Many US scholars like Norman Cigar or Beverly Allen (just to name a few) following the same logic as the journalists have been pointing to the US government, especially the Clinton administration, and Western Europe as passive bystanders which missed to realize their potential to halt an ongoing genocide³⁸. Those scholars tend to reduce the complexity to a simple dichotomy characterized by Muslim victims and Serbian perpetrators. Explanations of bystander behaviour are not given. Furthermore, no explanation is intended to be given since the bystander issue in those works appears only as a subject of strong condemnation.

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

In contrast, more serious and meritorious works derive from European scholars. Although not explicitly using bystander concepts they discuss the role of the bystander behaviour of Western powers in a more differentiated way depicting a more gradual development of their involvement in the war. Xavier Bougarel, for example, criticizes the oversimplified identification of Western powers as passive bystanders. He draws attention to the gradual involvement of the Western powers especially after the summer 1995 when the dynamics of the war accelerated rapidly³⁹. Moreover, he makes the reader aware of the very wide definition of the international community, which included not only policy makers, but also many non-governmental organizations, NATO, UN, which in varying degrees were involved in Bosnia and Herzegovina, which as Bougarel states, determined the rhythm of the war in Bosnia⁴⁰. As he argues, the successive peace plans were shaping the internal configuration of the conflict. Massive humanitarian support, for example, the positioning of UNPROFOR in war zones as well as the proclamation of no-flying zones definitely provided the population to survive and take refuge in the proclaimed enclaves. Massive air attacks in September 1995, which were definitely provoked by the Srebrenica massacre in July of the same year accelerated the crisis in the Republic of Srpska. Additional intervention in the form of economic sanctions applied to Serbia and Montenegro as well as weapons embargo, although often achieving contra-effects are seen by the author as examples which are inconsistent with the previously mentioned accusations. However, Bougarel agrees that more could have been done but explains the ineffectiveness of the Western policy mainly by the unintended consequences of their negotiations resulting from the gap between the perceptions of the conflicting parties and the Western politicians⁴¹.

³⁸ See Cigar and Allen.

³⁹ Bougarel, p. 111.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 39.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 42.

Bourg and Shoup have adopted a more critical view towards the international community which they mainly define as bystanders which were providing outside intervention but still did not do enough to halt the conflict. Like Bougarel, the authors differentiate between governmental (in)action, organizations, peace-keeping troops etc. Although they acknowledge their interventions great criticism has been addressed especially towards the lack of military force which was expected from the U.S. policy⁴². Without necessarily providing an explanation for this passivity, which the authors ascribe mainly to the U.S. government, Burg and Shoup cite some U. S. policy maker, which in their statements were illuminating enough. Hutchings comment, which they quote points to the essence of the American reasoning

"[policymakers] never decided whether important U.S. interests were at stake. We never decided whether Yugoslavia mattered enough to invest considerable American leadership and, if need be. To place substantial numbers of American men and women in harm's way to halt or at least contain the conflict."⁴³

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

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

Identifying somebody as a bystander onlooker implies also declaring the same person, government or state being able to rescue or halt an ongoing genocide. Interestingly, the radius of bystanders in the literature has been mainly restricted to the Western countries endowing only them with the possibility to react and in the role of a *deus ex machina* resolve the perceived aggression and genocide. The Arab World and the East, as far as I know, have never been put in this context. However, as it seems those regions discerned the war as a matter which called for their intervention. Thus, by sending Mujahedin troops to their «Muslim brothers» those reacted faster than the West. This issue has never been a matter of discussion in the literature, however, and calls for further research.

In regard to the only local case which has been identified by the ICTY as genocide, Srebrenica, the role of bystander was again assigned to the external group, namely the UN. Being declared a «safe area» UN troops were obliged to effectively guarantee 'peace and security' of the civilians. A growing literature on this event⁴⁴ has repeatedly criticized the behaviour of the UN Dutch troops and especially the Dutch Defence Minister Jorge Voorhoeve and UN top envoy Yasushi Akashi, who let the Serbs enter Srebrenica, which in the end resulted in a tragedy. Thus, as Vetlesen argues, those bystanders by assignment due to their professional and principled non-

⁴² Burg & Shoup, p. 200.

⁴³ Hutchings, *American Diplomacy*, p. 320, cited in Burg & Shoup, p. 200.

⁴⁴ See: Hoping & Both 1996, Danner 1998, Vetlesen 1997 etc.

involvement, which is otherwise viewed as highly meritorious, provided the Serb soldiers with the opportunity to commit the massacre⁴⁵.

An alternative definition of bystander in the Srebrenica case is given by the Bosnian general Sefer Halilovic, who has accused the Muslim government in Sarajevo for remaining passive and letting innocent people get killed⁴⁶. His main explanation why the Muslim government did not react to halt the massacre and left Srebrenica in Serb hands, was the goal to exchange this region for Serbian parts of Sarajevo⁴⁷. 1996 women from Srebrenica angrily protested in the streets of Tuzla condemning Naser Oric, the Muslim general in Srebrenica at the time of the massacre, for having failed to protect them⁴⁸. In July 2003, a heated polemic between Halilovic, who accused Alija Izetbegovic for being a passive bystander (although he never uses this terminology), and Izetbegovic himself was taking place in the newspaper *Olsobodjenje*⁴⁹.

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

In view of their undeniable influence and of the information, voicing serious concern, in their possession, the Yugoslav federal authorities should, in the view of the Court, have made the best efforts within their power to try and prevent the tragic events then taking shape, whose scale, though it could not have been foreseen with certainty, might at least have been surmised. The FRY leadership, and President Milošević above all, were fully aware of the climate of deep-seated hatred which reigned between the Bosnian Serbs and the Muslims in the Srebrenica region. Yet the Respondent has not shown that it took any initiative to prevent what happened, or any action on its part to avert the atrocities which were committed. It must therefore be concluded that the organs of the Respondent did nothing to prevent the Srebrenica massacres, claiming that they were powerless to do so, which hardly tallies with their known influence over the VRS. As indicated above, for a State to be held responsible for breaching its obligation of prevention, it does not need to be proven that the State concerned definitely had the power to prevent the genocide; it is sufficient that it had the means to do so and that it manifestly refrained from using them. Such is the case here. In view of the foregoing, the Court concludes that the Respondent violated its obligation to prevent the Srebrenica genocide in such a manner as to engage its international responsibility.⁵⁰

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

⁴⁵ Vetlesen, 2000, p.521.

⁴⁶ See, Halilovic, 2005.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 257.

⁴⁸ See, feljton in *Oslobodjenje*, 24.-29.August 1996.

⁴⁹ *Oslobodjenje*, 11. July 2003, p. 4.

⁵⁰ <http://www.ictj-cij.org/docket/index.php?pr=1897&code=bhy&p1=3&p2=1&p3=6&case=91&k=f4>

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

What still remains is the disputable character of Srebrenica and involvement in this event as a bystander. Nowadays, Srebrenica and the remembering of the massacre has been used to legitimate the SDA's Bosniak policy and for corroboration of their victim-identity. Further research has to be conducted with more revealing documents who might give insight into who really was a bystander and who could have halted the massacre.

In recapitulation, looking at different spheres of discourses, the media, the academia, and the legal doctrine, bystanders in the Bosnian conflict mainly external bystanders onlookers have been identified and discussed on the level of state, and governments. Even when persons like Bush or Clinton are mentioned they are always seen as representatives of the whole government, thus standing for a collective. Individual bystanders, in the research which has been conducted so far, are missing. They, however, appear in the personal accounts of people and will be discussed later on. We may conclude, that awareness of (external) bystanders has not been articulated on a very sophisticated level. Moreover, as the Western media coverage has shown, it often was a product of controlled information employed for victimization strategies by the Muslim side. Explanatory models for bystander behaviour among identified instances have been scarce and mostly focusing on self interest. All those factors call for a more detailed examination of external bystander behaviour where a more situational approach with evolutionary patterns might be employed rather than a static identification without concern about specific constellations and their processual character. Moreover, given the fact that only Srebrenica has been defined as genocide, the question remains to what extent bystander behaviour is applicable on the case of the Bosnian war as a whole.

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

Bystanders in the Bosnian Conflict?

As already noted, the bystander issue derives mainly from the scholarly literature on the Holocaust. It has been emphasized that Nazi propaganda's primary function was not to incite violence but to pacify in-group members and accommodate them to the new system of exclusion and persecution of Jews⁵¹. With the creation of a narrative which labelled the Jews «objective enemies» of society and thus endowed them with the role of a scapegoat, the society was to be made receptive to a reality of collectivist exclusion of the Jews. «Ordinary people», in-group member not involved in the perpetration of violence, were expected to perpetuate their «ordinary» social practices on the quotidian level in their already embodied social roles. The reorganization of the framework of reality which made the extermination of Jews

⁵¹ Dulic, p. 32.

being necessary was to be experienced as norm-given and should not disturb the continuity of everyday life. Consequently, the process of destruction was integrated into a quasi normal and peaceful every-day life reproduced by already habituated social actions, which expected the individual to become a passive bystander, onlooker not reacting to the destruction process which was going on simultaneously.

In contrast, the Bosnian war was an example of an armed combat, which raises the crucial question about the existence of internal bystanders. It was shaped by ethnic mobilization and conflict in which all three ethnic groups of the country participated. After the first shot in Sarajevo and the barricades along the streets, the normative framework abruptly changed and was located in an unexpected context of violence. The public political and social landscape was no more offering normality in which one could have perpetuated quotidian habits. As Dusan Kecmanovic, a Serbian psychiatrist and former professor at the Faculty of Medicine in Sarajevo observes, the political landscape of a once peaceful multinational and multiconfessional Bosnia and Herzegovina changed into a public space of violence where ethnic affiliation and nationalist passions became the crucial determinant of identity formation and perception of others among all three groups, the Serbs, Croats and Muslims/Bosniaks⁵². As soon as nationalist parties introduced the cultural grammar of nationalism which began to dictate the narratives, the new reality started to provide civilians with new identities independently of their will to accept it or not. Thus, people who once defined themselves through their profession or class affiliation were forced into members of the Serb, Croat or Bosniak people, depending on their names or religious affiliation. In other words, according to the logic of ethnic times, a Serb in Sarajevo, who probably did not share anything but the ethnic affiliation with the Serbian soldiers who were bombing the city, by force was valued and equated with the Serb aggressors. This violent imposture of ethnic identities on people served to involve them in the armed conflict and make them reproduce ethnic roles. Therefore, no continuity of the former realities of a multicultural Bosnia was intended to be preserved, but a discontinuity was to be established according to which people should quit with the past. The imposture of ethnic identity, which one might not even perceive as one's own, in this new context of violence made it hard, to continue a civilian life and remain aside to what happened. The only form of accommodation to the newly defined framework of norms was the acceptance of ethnic identity, which was especially hard for people of mixed ethnic affiliations or who were having partner who belonged to a different ethnic group. These people were left without any alternative but to escape the conflict driven area which they were first to do. How people dealt with those new realities will be shown below.

This abrupt change of reality and situation was not prepared by propaganda and did not serve to make people continue their old social practices, since those were mostly based on inter-ethnic acceptance. The change was rather to mobilize people for agency in ethnic terms, rather than to pacify them.

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

⁵² See, Kecmanovic, 2002.

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

Media in Bosnia and Herzegovina

Ervin Staub has emphasized the evolutionary feature of the pacification process during the Holocaust. According to him psychological possibilities to stay passive to human sufferings result form a developmental process along the psychological continuum of destruction⁵³. Here, ideology and propaganda have been identified as the main tool which served the amalgamation of new utopian views and the acceptance of a new hierarchy of social order. This explains also the cruciality of the media as a medium for establishing a parasitic attitude towards the atrocities without the feeling of responsibility to act.

As far as the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina is concerned, there were different methods of pacifying the local population. In regard to the media on the Bosnian level Marc Thomson has analysed the change of its discourse. He adverts to the fact that no ideological submissiveness to nationalism was given prior to the war in Bosnia. Thus, no nationalist propaganda was spread through the media and no pacifying attempts were made. In fact, during the transition to multiparty government and the run-down to war, Bosnian media, like daily «Oslobođenje» or the TVSA (television Sarajevo) were trying to retain anti-nationalist attitudes despite initial attempts by the Serb nationalist party SDS to split the media along national lines. As Thomson concludes, this was not so much a result of independent-minded journalists as a consequence of the government's inability to subjugate the media to its control. Moreover, nationalist sectarianism was increasingly opposed by the largest Muslim SDA party, since its overriding goal was to preserve the republic⁵⁴. Also, as armed conflict erupted in Kosovo, Slovenia and Croatia the Bosnian way of reporting was characterized by impartiality which required to represent all parties to the conflict.

Even after the break out of the war in Bosnia the media continued to employ a vague vocabulary which was more mystifying than pronouncing the nature of conflict. The reason for this interpretation of the events which were going on in Croatia and later even in Bosnia are several. Fear was one of them. As the RTVBH radio journalist, Rade Trbojevic, a Serb by nationality, stated, proclaiming the JNA attack on Sarajevo might have resulted in the realisation of threats that were already addressed to journalists by Serbian nationalist politicians in the form of individual harassment and intimidation⁵⁵. However, this is not enough to explain the reasons for the unusual media behaviour. The psychological factor and the belief that JNA could never turn against Bosnia, regardless of what it might have done in Croatia, and that the outside world would never let a general war happen, was widespread in Bosnia, including among journalists⁵⁶. In the same vein Milos Vlastic from the Serbian weekly *Vreme* wrote that «the possibility of a war in Bosnia and Herzegovina was so appalling to everyone that it bordered on the unthinkable, like a global thermonuclear war, from a Yugoslav standpoint.⁵⁷» A professional factor was also given by the fact that the media were peopled with ideological journalists who were used to work for a

⁵³ Staub, 1989, p. 41.

⁵⁴ Thomson, p. 263.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 215.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 230

⁵⁷ Milos Vlastic, *Balkan war report*, Jan. 1993, cited in Thomson, p. 230.

totalitarian regime which provided a pro-Yugoslav and pro-JNA ideological framework. All those factors resulted finally in a RTVBH's effect on its audience which was precisely opposite to TV Belgrade and TV Zagreb on theirs, it disarmed them psychologically.

As the war progressed and Bosnia came to be divided into several ethnically dominated regions, nationalist media were set up alongside the parallel autonomous territories. Journalists who were not willing to subvert to nationalist discourse were forced to do so. Otherwise individual harassment or intimidation was to follow. One victim of this new policy was TV journalist Ljubomir Ljubojevic, a Serb by nationality. After criticizing the (Bosnian) government he was forced to join the Bosnian Army. In his effort to escape from Sarajevo, he was caught by Serb troop who took him to Pale and forced him on Kanal S (a Serbian newly introduced channel) to spit on himself for having served «Muslim television».⁵⁸

On April 8, 1992 after the independence of the «republic» was proclaimed by its leadership under Karadzic, *Srpska Republika Novinska Agencija SRNA* (Serb Republic News Agency) was established as the news agency of the Serb Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Its content was very similar to the TV programme broadcast in Serbia based on the hallmarks of disinformation and close collaboration with Serb media. Their stories often contradictive and aggressive in their way with frequent employment of manipulative techniques gave distorted pictures of the happenings in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

The Croat equivalence of SRNA and Kanal S were *Herceg-bosanska Novinska Agencija*, HABENA (the Herceg Bosna News Agency) and TV Siroki Brijeg. HABENA was founded on 28 August 1993 after the proclamation of the «Herceg republic». Following similar patterns as the Serb nationalist media, the reports manipulated the tragedy of Bosnian Croats for Croatian television ranting against *mujahedin* and Islamic fanatics⁵⁹.

Although the content of media started to split apart and adopted nationalist views which were often forced upon journalists it is still a matter of research to what extent these nationalist media had an influence on the local population. No study has been done on the media's direct impact on peoples' behaviour during the war. Although Roy Gutman has argued that local Serb population in Eastern Bosnia which were running the detention camps accused the inmates of the same offences which Serb media was broadcasting it remains a question to what extent this was an internalized attitude⁶⁰. In order to grasp the impact of media propaganda on the population further study employing more anthropological methods has to be done. Given the fact that media breakdown left several parts of Bosnia isolated without any information supply the consummation of media was restricted to casual information/propaganda. Additionally, most of the local population which had to witness killings of their neighbours stood by because of threats rather than out of conviction of the truth of propaganda (as will be shown later on). Therefore, in the case of the Bosnian war it seems very vague to explain standing by behaviour through media influence and propaganda.

To conclude, the opinion making elites in Bosnia and Herzegovina served an aim opposed to the nationalist discourse which the new political elite tried to implement. Thus, no propaganda previous to the armed conflict was broadcast in

⁵⁸ Thomson, p. 216.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 262.

⁶⁰ Gutman, p. 123.

order to prepare people for war or even to pacify them. The advent of ethnic times instead came abruptly without previous social engineering and collectivist exclusion.

Security Dilemma and Imposed Bystander Behaviour

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

In war reports it is often emphasized that the local population was not, as a rule, eager to be part of ethnic cleansing. The accelerated nationalisation and polarization of Bosnia was initially dismissed by the locals who often refused to accommodate to the policy of ethnic cleansing. However, what locals still did was witnessing passively actions of ethnic cleansing which were most often committed by external military forces⁶¹.

In fact, in order to achieve the passive observer-behaviour among the local population various stratagems were used. Most often in order to establish anti-Muslim/Croatian/Serb attitudes, campaigns were initiated by the organizers of ethnic cleansing operations, usually by playing on fear. Information/propaganda was often spread that members of the other ethnic groups would initiate ethnic cleansing of Muslim/Croats/Serbs if the addressed group did not act first. This mobilization technique which enforced a situation of a so called security dilemma⁶² were the most powerful and frequent motivators of the local population to close ranks against its former neighbours or stay passive bystander to the proceeding cleansing.

One very illustrating example of the security dilemma is given by the account on ethnic cleansing of Muslims, presented by Ejub Stitkovac. He recounts how the story of the murder of a farmer's wife by Muslims was spread far and wide in the area around Bihac in order to turn the Serb population against the Muslims. The instigators of ethnic cleansing, however, were most often outsiders to the cities and towns about to be cleansed and often included warriors from Serbia⁶³. Thus, although not driven into the destruction process, the local population acting out of imposed anguish did not oppose the killings of innocent people. By spreading misinformation which portrayed other ethnic groups as potential killers locals were trapped into a logic of reality «kill first, or in this case let being killed, or run the risk of being killed».

Another illuminating example is given by the American journalist Peter Maass who interviewed two Serb women. When asking why the Muslims in Banja Luka have been arrested the women answered:

«Because they were planning to take over the city. They had already drawn up lists... Thank God they were arrested first»⁶⁴

⁶¹ See, Calic, pp, 121-130.

⁶² Security dilemma has been used as an explanatory model for conflict situations mainly on the international state level. Its main assumption is that states, but also individual, act violently towards another out of uncertainty about the other's intention. Thus as e. g. individuals can be find themselves in a situation of kill first (or in this case let be killed) or run the risk of being killed. For an illuminating explanation of the security dilemma on the intrastate level, see Paul Roe.

⁶³ Stitkovac & Udovicki, 1995, p. 181.

⁶⁴ Cited in Vestlesen, 2000, p. 527

Running the risk of being killed meant not only by other ethnic groups but very soon it turned out that one risked being killed even by the perpetrators of one's own ethnic group. In Bijeljina, for example, a number of local Serbs tried to halt a massacre being perpetrated by Arkan's forces and, according to Bosnian sources, were killed by Arkan men⁶⁵.

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

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

Rape has been used as one method to terrorize civilian populations in villages and forcing ethnic groups to leave. [...] The Serb paramilitary units would enter a village. Several women would be raped in the presence of others so that word spread throughout the village and a climate of fear was created. Several days later, Yugoslav Popular Army (JNA) officers would arrive at the village offering permission to the non-Serb population to leave the village.⁶⁶

In a situation like this, the role of a bystander was not the result of a free choice motivated by whatever reason (ideological, career, etc) but of the imposition of a role of bystander by the perpetrators. The policy of bystander identity imposture appeared in conjunction with the effort to displace a targeted ethnic group from the region. The compulsion to be a witness of a crime and to stand by served not to make people accommodate along a continuum of atrocities⁶⁷, but to alarm and mobilize them. In this context of abnormality, without a pluralism of available social roles, people got forced into the role of a «close bystander» becoming a proximal witnesses of atrocities. Any possibilities to act in a different way than to observe the occurrences were excluded.

As Maja Povrzanovic states, in such a context of wartime, politics of identity based not on choice but on the absence of choice, not on strategies of negotiation but primarily on strategies of physical survival⁶⁸. Actually, those «bystanders» were simultaneously victims who suffered traumas in their role of forced onlookers. Roy Gutman described this enforced on-looking in the detention camps. According to his accounts there were even situations in which intra-familial bystanders had to witness rapes of their family members⁶⁹.

Thus, in the context of the Bosnian war, «passive» local population was often left without an alternative to act. And even if one risked to act as a rescuer often ended up becoming a victim oneself. Thus, no categories of the so far explored bystander context might be applicable to this context of internal bystander-behaviour. Perhaps one might think about a category of «coerced/forced bystander», or «imposition of bystander-behaviour». This, however, remains a task of further research. Additionally, probably a more analytical ethnographic work might help in understanding the dynamics of this situational type of bystander behaviour. Approaching the issue on individual level rather than reporting it only in terms of

⁶⁵ Burg & Shoup, p. 129.

⁶⁶ Mazowiecki report January 1993, see <http://www.haverford.edu/relg/sells/reports/mazowiecki.html>

⁶⁷ Staub, 1989, p. 41.

⁶⁸ Povrzanovic, p. 180.

⁶⁹ Gutman, p. 97.

military strategies or patterns, a better psychological insight into this behaviour could be provided.

Bystanders Rescuers

How individuals resisted the enforced nationalistic logic of reality and the fact that some people did indeed help each other independently of their ethnic and religious affiliation has already been documented in several works. Mainly anthropological research⁷⁰ on the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina, as well as some personal accounts by „ordinary people“ collected and published Svjetlana Broz, the granddaughter of Josip Broz Tito, have proved that the will to help others besides the risk one was taking was present. Most of the published accounts are personal stories told by individuals, either in interviews, diaries or autobiographic works. Thus, what we have available about people who rescued others is not research but subjective documents, which still require critical analysis and an academic approach. Due to the fact that personal stories and memories are mostly accounts of single situations of small scale help on the individual level no „evolution of commitment to help along a continuum of benevolence“⁷¹ can be drawn. Thus, in order to discuss the rescuers in relation to changes of formal and moral rules/standards, further research would be required.

Depending on the situation, individual rescuers are reported to be found among civilians as well as soldiers. Dusan Kecmanovic, for example, on the run out of Sarajevo through Croat-held Herceg-Bosnia reports his personal salvation by a Croatian soldier. Being Serb in a Croatian dominated territory in ethnic times, meant, as I have already mentioned, being equated with Chetniks and the enemy, which happened to Kecmanovic. After an interrogation by a Croatian police-man Kecmanovic escaped internment and probably even death with the help of a former student who in an open radio contact heard that a Chetnik had been caught and the name of Kecmanovic being mentioned and rushed into the headquarter to rescue his former professor⁷². It is disputable to what extent Kecmanovic's former student was actually a „bystander“ since he was also a of Croatian soldier wearing a uniform and being involved in the conflict. However, it is clear that having the role of a Croatian soldier in ethnic times, in this specific situation he bestowed greater commitment to the role of a rescuer inspired by the fact that it was his former professor. Other stories reveal individual soldiers helping civilians who were total strangers to them. Often the social background of these people is not mentioned. Regarding the personal motive to aid people it often remains a mystery. Moreover, due to very personal reports that focus only on individual experiences, it remains a question whether those rescuers were actually acting exclusively in the reported specific situation or if this was only one example of a series of systematic rescue attempts.

Turning to the civilian rescuers, Svjetlana Broz has published a decent collection of personal often very touching stories about brave individuals, often civilian opponents to nationalism and aided people even at the expense of their own lives⁷³. Again, those civilians, who rescued can hardly be labelled bystanders since at

⁷⁰ One of the most illuminating works is Macek's dissertation about everyday life of Sarajevans under siege, whoh according to the author's observations did resist nationalism by helping each other independent from their ethnic or religious affiliation. See, Macek 2000.

⁷¹ Staub, 1989, p. 167.

⁷² Kecmanovic, p. 28.

⁷³ See Broz 1999.

the same time they were victims. Especially stories from Sarajevo under siege illuminate this. One person who has been mentioned in several stories from Sarajevo is the taxi driver, Mile Plakalovic, a Serb by nationality. Being a taxi-driver he was well known among Sarajevans for his courage to drive injured people of all ethnic groups to the hospital for free. We can assume that Plakalovic is an example of individuals with high moral standards, as bystanders rescuers in the Holocaust have been characterized, whose greatest commitment was to the role of a helper in different situations and contexts.

Anthropological literature in which everyday life of „ordinary people“ during the war has been documented has also called attention to aid which people were giving each other independently of their nationality. It has been mainly presented in the context of taking care of neighbours. Anthropologists, therefore, have paid great attention to the neighbours and discovered an explanatory model for the helping behaviour in the so-called *komsiluk*, a Turkish work for neighbourhood⁷⁴. As Bojan Baskar argues, *komsiluk* derives from the Ottoman legacy in which interreligious tolerance is distinguished from other Imperial legacies. This practice was deeply inscribed especially in Bosnia, where three religious groups were living next to each other for centuries⁷⁵. This attitude found its way in the literature as a specific Bosnian habitus of multiethnic tolerance and peaceful cohabitation which allows the „simultaneity of both shared and separate places“⁷⁶. The perpetuation of this reality of tolerance has been noticed by anthropologists in the war, and often served as a motive for people to oppose ethnic imperatives and help each. Speaking in terms of symbolic interactionism we can argue that in these cases people felt greater commitment to the role of the neighbour than to an ethnically defined role⁷⁷. Preserving a good neighbourhood which resulted in helping each other to survive was also an attempt to preserve the multiethnic reality known from peaceful times. But, here again, bystanders in its original form cannot be implied, since each of those people were also victims.

All those stories are examples concerning people who were within the war and could be delineated internal rescuers although probably not bystanders as used in the Holocaust context. Regarding external bystander who became involved in helping civilians, examples on organizational as well as individual levels appear in some literature, mostly documenting their efforts in collecting food and clothes and sending them into the war zones. One example of an Italian private businessman who on several occasions sent trucks loaded with food and clothes to Bosnia is documented in Beverly Allen's book. The stimulation for such an action was given after the information and some reports he got from the same author⁷⁸.

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

To conclude, although no research has been done on rescuing behaviour in the war, personal accounts show that there were individuals who extended the ethnic limitations by helping and rescuing people. Although they cannot be viewed as bystanders, in certain situations the role of rescuer appeared to become more decisive.

⁷⁴ See, Macek, 2000; Baskar 2007.

⁷⁵ Baskar, p. 2.

⁷⁶ See Bringa, p. 18.

⁷⁷ For a detailed exploration of symbolic interactionism, see Stryker 1980.

⁷⁸ See Allen, p. 108.

This behaviour is mostly reported on the individual level, however, and restricted to single situations which hinders an insight into a more evolutionary aspect of this type of behaviour. Regarding motives for rescue one explanation has entered academic discourse, i. e. *komsiluk*. All this calls for further attention by academics to explore new explanatory concept which could explain courageous behaviour by individuals in the Bosnian war.

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