PART 3.

THE PRIJEDOR GENOCIDE – WITNESSES

The photo of the emaciated Fikret Alic in the camp of Omarska, 20 kilometres southwest of Prijedor, made headlines around the world
Photo: tv-history.tv

On 6 December 1992 *The New York Times* described a May 1992 attack in Prijedor:

"When the attack began, Serbs from the village guided the tanks to the homes of certain Muslims…and the inhabitants were asked to come out and show their identity cards. Many of those who did were summarily executed…The bodies of the dead were carried away by trucks, which left a trail of blood. Those not killed on the spot were transferred to a convoy heading toward Omarska, a Serb concentration camp."

What happened in the Prijedor area was among the most brutal crimes of the war. The survivors of the round-ups were taken to three camps. The objective of these camps was to support the systematic "cleansing" of the Prijedor area of non-Serbs. Many were taken to the Omarska camp. Others were sent to camps in Keraterm and Trnopolje. By the autumn of 1992, after an international outcry, the camps were closed.

Prijedor is in the north-west of Republika Srpska, not far from the Croatian border. Before the war, the municipality had a population of 112,543 – 44 per cent Bosniak, 42 per cent Serb, and 6 per cent Croat.

Twenty kilometres southwest of Prijedor, Omarska is an iron mining and ore processing facility. In May 1992 it was transformed into one of the most brutal prison camps in Bosnia. An estimated 5,000 Muslim and Catholic civilians, including thirty-seven women, were held illegally as prisoners at Omarska. It was officially termed an investigation centre, its detainees accused by the Bosnian Serbs of "paramilitary activities".

Torture, starvation, and dehumanizing conditions were part of daily life. On any given day, dozens of prisoners might be killed. Many of the atrocities occurred at the infamous White House, an old first-aid station for miners. Interrogations, frequently accompanied by severe beatings, were conducted on a daily basis. In particular, Bosnian Muslim and Bosnian Croat political and civic leaders, intellectuals, the wealthy, as well as other non-Serbs considered "extremists" (or simply assumed to have resisted the Bosnian Serbs) were subjected to beatings and mistreatment, which often resulted in death.

"After arriving at Omarska one quickly realized that it was not only a prison for interrogations, but a place for torture; a concentration camp in which civilians were killed and tortured for no reason or purpose," former inmateSatko Mujagic – "Mujo" – has written. He was taken to Omarska with his father in April 1992.

In a graphic personal account of what he calls *"the anguish, evil and bloodshed of Omarska"*, Mujo describes how he kept the will to live and overcame a near-fatal attack of dysentery:

"It was during those hot and bloody July days, when Mujo became sick and had to stay behind and sleep when everyone else ran to get their lunch, the only meal of the day, that Mujo and his father received money from his mother. Looking back, this is what had decided their fate. Mujo's father started buying small pieces of soap, bread and cigarettes. It was risky; if the guards found out about the money he could be killed. With his father's help Mujo slowly started to recover…Looking at his old man through the fog of illness, Mujo dreamed of freedom. Since his father hadn't given up, Mujo decided that he could not give up either, even though death was knocking at the door and asking to take his soul. Even though death seemed like the only possible outcome, Mujo kept the will to live."

Alida Vracic and Goran Tirak in the Omarska camp.

The camp was closed in late August 1992, following exposure of the atrocities in reports by *Newsday* reporter Roy Gutman. The horror of the camp was exposed worldwide in dramatic TV reports on ITN, the British news channel, and by Ed Vulliamy of *The Guardian*. "*Omarska was a monstrosity*," reported Vulliamy, "*an inferno of murder, torture and rape. It was a stain upon our century*." He later wrote:

"The men are at various stages of human decay and affliction; the bones of their elbows and their writs protruded like pieces of jagged stone. From the pencil thin stalks to which their arms have been reduced…There is nothing quite like the sight of the prisoner desperate to talk and convey some terrible truth that is so near yet so far, but who dares not. Their states burn, they speak only with their terrified silence, and eyes inflamed with the articulation of stark, undiluted, fear-without-hope."

(Seasons in Hell, Ed Vulliamy, 1994)

Ed Vulliamy

Other men from Prijedor were sent to Keraterm, a former ceramics factory on the eastern outskirts of Prijedor. It began operating on 24 May 1992 and held up to 1,500 prisoners. According to testimony taken by the U.N:

"Conditions in Keraterm were atrocious; prisoners were crowded into its [four] rooms, as many as 570 in one room, with barely space to lie down on the concrete floors… Prisoners were called out, attacked with bars and batons and made to beat each other… Some who were called out never returned."

Another 4,000 older men women and children were incarcerated at Trnopolje, a formerly Bosniak majority village. The camp enclosed the entire village. Trnopolje was enclosed by barbed wire and surrounded by machine gun emplacements. The camp consisted of a school building and the former municipal centre and theatre. Prisoners were also held in tents.

When Omarska and Keraterm were closed in August 1992, the surviving prisoners were moved to Trnopolje.

Trnopolje was also a deportation centre. Deported prisoners were often first forced to sign an agreement to "voluntarily" relinquish all of their property. In early October 1992, Trnopolje was officially closed.

Some of the RS officials responsible for running the camps have since been indicted for genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes. Some have been convicted, while others are still awaiting trial at the ICTY. Three have just been convicted by the War Crimes Court in Sarajevo.

The guilty men:

Three men have already been convicted by the ICTY for crimes committed in the camps around Prijedor.

Milomir Stakić a politician from Prijedor, was sentenced to 40 years in prison

Duško Sikirica, commander of the Keraterm camp, sentenced to fifteen years after pleading guilty to crimes against humanity

Predrag Banović, former guard at Keraterm, sentenced to eight years after pleading guilty to twenty five different charges

Three other war criminals were convicted by the Bosnian War Crimes Chamber in May 2008.

Željko Mejakić, in charge of Omarska, was sentenced to 21 years for "killings, unlawful confinement of the captives in the camps, torture, sexual abuse, persecution and other inhumane acts such as confinement of the detainees in inhuman conditions, harassment, humiliation and other psychological abuse"

Momčilo Gruban, leader of one of the three guard shifts in the Omarska camp, was sentenced to 11 years for crimes against humanity

Duško Knežević was sentenced to 31 years for killings, torture and other inhumane acts, and sexual assault at the Omarska and Keraterm camps

The horrors of a camp called Omarska and Serb strategy

*by **Mark Danner***

To the hundreds of millions who first beheld them on their television screens that August day in 1992, the faces staring out from behind barbed wire seemed powerfully familiar.**[1]** Sunken-cheeked, hollow-eyed, their skulls shaved, their bodies wasted and frail, they did not seem men at all but living archetypes, their faces stylized masks of tragedy. One had thought such faces consigned to the century's horde of images-the emaciated figures of the 1940s shuffling about in filthy striped uniforms, the bulldozers pushing into dark ditches great masses of lank white bodies. Yet here, a mere half century later, in 1992, came these gaunt beings, clinging to life in Omarska and Trnopolje and the other camps run by Serbs in

northern Bosnia, and now displayed before the eyes of the world like fantastic, rediscovered beasts.

The Germans, creators of millions of such living dead, had christened them Muselmänner-Musulmen, Muslims. At Auschwitz, wrote Primo Levi,

The *Muselmänner*, the drowned, form the backbone of the camp, an anonymous mass...of non-men who march and labor in silence, the divine spark dead in them.... One hesitates to call them living: one hesitates to call their death death, in the face of which they have no fear, as they are too tired to understand.**[2]**

In Omarska as in Auschwitz the masters created these walking corpses from healthy men by employing simple methods: withhold all but the barest nourishment, forcing the prisoners' bodies to waste away; impose upon them a ceaseless terror by subjecting them to unremitting physical cruelty; immerse them in degradation and death and decay, destroying all hope and obliterating the will to live.

"We won't waste our bullets on them," a guard at Omarska, which the Serbs set up in a former open-pit iron mine, told a United Nations representative in mid-1992. "They have no roof. There is sun and rain, cold nights, and beatings two times a day. We give them no food and no water. They will starve like animals."**[3]**

On August 5, 1992, Ed Vulliamy of The Guardian, the first newspaperman admitted into Omarska, stood in the camp's "canteen" and watched, stupefied, as thirty emaciated men stumbled out into the yard, squinting at the sunlight:

... A group of prisoners...have just emerged from a door in the side of a large rust-colored metal shed. [T]hey run in single file across the courtyard.... Above them in an observation post is the watchful eye, hidden behind reflective sunglasses, of a beefy guard who follows their weary canter with the barrel of his heavy machine gun.

Their...heads [are] newly shaven, their clothes baggy over their skeletal bodies. Some are barely able to move. In the canteen,... they line up in obedient and submissive silence and collect...a meager, watery portion of beans....

They are given precisely three minutes to run from the shed, wait for the food and gulp it down, and run back to the shed. "Whoever didn't make it would get beaten or killed," a prisoner identified only as Mirsad told Helsinki Watch investigators. "The stew we were given was boiling hot...so we all had 'inside burns.' The inside of my mouth was peeling."**[4]**

Vulliamy and his colleagues stand and gaze at the creatures struggling to wolf down the rations:

...[T]he bones of their elbows and wrists protrude like pieces of jagged stone from the pencil-thin stalks to which their arms have been reduced. Their skin is putrefied, the

complexions...have corroded. [They] are alive but decomposed, debased, degraded, and utterly subservient, and yet they fix their huge hollow eyes on us with [what] looks like blades of knives.

It is an extraordinary confrontation, this mutual stare: Vulliamy and his colleagues are reporting from inside a working concentration camp. All the while, though, Serb guards in combat fatigues, cradling AK-47s and bearing great military knives sheathed at their hips, trudge heavily about the room, their eyes glaring above their beards.

Vulliamy moves forward to speak to a "young man, emaciated, sunken-eyed and attacking his watery bean stew like a famished dog, his spindly hands shaking," but the fellow stops him: "I do not want to tell any lies," he says, "but I cannot tell the truth." It is an eloquent comment: most of these Muselmänner prove "too terrified to talk, bowing their heads and excusing themselves by casting a glance at the pacing soldiers, or else they just stare, opaque, spiritless, and terrified."

The reporters ask to see the hospital and receive a curt refusal. Nor may they look inside that white building-the White House, the prisoners call it-or the great "rust-colored shed" from which the men had come, squinting at the August sun.

Later, survivors describe the shed as "a vast human hen coop, in which thousands of men were crammed for twenty-four hours a day..., living in their own filth and, in many cases, dying from asphyxiation." So tightly were prisoners packed together in the stifling, airless heat, "Sakib R." tells Vulliamy, that lying down was impossible and some lost consciousness standing up, collapsing one against another.

I [counted] seven hundred that I could actually see [around me]. A lot of people went mad...: when they went insane, shuddering and screaming, they were taken out and shot.

Though guards at Omarska and other camps shot many prisoners, this was by no means the preferred method. If Auschwitz's killing tended to be mechanized and bureaucratized, Omarska's was emotional and personal, for it depended on the simple, intimate act of beating. "They beat us with clubs, bats, hoses, rifle butts," one survivor told a Helsinki Watch interviewer. "Their favorite was a thick rubber hose with metal on both ends." They beat us, said another, "with braided cable wires" and with pipes "filled with lead."

Next to the automatic rifle, next even to the knife (which was freely used at Omarska), the club or the pipe is exhausting, time-consuming, inefficient. Yet the guards made it productive. A female prisoner identified only as "J" told Helsinki Watch investigators:

We saw corpses piled one on top of another.... The bodies eventually were gathered with a forklift and put onto trucks-usually two large trucks and a third, smaller truck. The trucks first would unload containers of food, and then the bodies would be loaded [on].... This happened almost every day-sometimes there [were]...twenty or thirty-but usually there were more. Most of the deaths occurred as a result of beatings.**[5]**

One survivor interviewed by United Nations investigators estimated that "on many occasions, twenty to forty prisoners were killed at night by 'knife, hammer, and burning.' He stated that he had witnessed the killing of one prisoner by seven guards who poured petrol on him, set him on fire, and struck him upon the head with a hammer." All prisoners were beaten, but according to the UN investigators, guards in all the camps meted out especially savage treatment "to intellectuals, politicians, police, and the wealthy."**[6]** When four guards summoned the president of the local Croatian Democratic Union, Silvije Saric, along with Professor Puskar from nearby Prijedor, for "interrogation," the female prisoner testified,

I heard beating and yelling.... At times it sounded as if wood were being shattered, but those were bones that were being broken.

...When they opened the door ..., they started yelling at us, "Ustasa slut, see what we do to them!" ...I saw two piles of blood and flesh in the corner. The two men were so horribly beaten that they no longer had the form of human beings.**[7]**

Apart from obvious differences in scale and ambition, it is the Serbs' reliance on this laborious kind of murder that most strikingly distinguishes the workings of their camps from those of the German death factories. At many of the latter, healthy arrivals would work as slaves until they were reduced to being *Muselmänner*; death came when camp bureaucrats judged them no longer fit to provide any useful service to the Reich. The gas chambers-routinized, intentionally impersonal means of killing-had evolved partly out of a concern for the effect that committing mass murder would have on troops, even on men specially trained to do it. As Raul Hilberg observed,

The Germans employed the phrase Seelenbelastung ("burdening of the soul") with reference to machine-gun fire...directed at men, women, and children in prepared ditches. After all, the men that were firing these weapons were themselves fathers. How could they do this day after day? It was then that the technicians developed a gas van designed to lessen the suffering of the perpetrator.**[8]**

And even within the camps themselves, SS officers worried that violence and sadism would demoralize and corrupt their elite troops. "The SS leaders," Wolfgang Sofsky writes,

were indifferent to the suffering of the victims, but not to the morale of their men. Their attention was aroused...by the sadistic excesses of individual tormenters. As a countermeasure, camp brothels were set up, and *the task of punishment was delegated to specially selected prisoners.* The leadership also transferred certain thugs whose behavior had become intolerable. [Emphasis added.**[9]**

At Omarska such men would have been cherished; the out-and-out passion with which a guard administered beatings and devised tortures could greatly bolster his prestige. Acts of

flamboyant violence, publicly performed, made of some men celebrities of sadism. In his memoir *The Tenth Circle of Hell*, Rezak Hukanovic-a Muslim who was a journalist in Prijedor before he was taken to Omarska-describes how guards responded when a prisoner rejected the order to strip and stood immobile amid the cowering naked inmates:

The guard...fired several shots in the air. The man stood stubbornly in place without making the slightest movement. While bluish smoke still rose from the rifle barrel, the guard struck the clothed man in the middle of the head with the rifle butt, once and then again, until the man fell. Then the guard...moved his hand to his belt. A knife flashed in his hand, a long army knife.

He bent down, grabbing hold of the poor guy's hair.... Another guard joined in, continuously cursing. He, too, had a flashing knife in his hand.... The guards [used] them to tear away the man's clothes. After only a few seconds, they stood up, their own clothes covered with blood....

...The poor man stood up a little, or rather tried to, letting out excruciating screams. He was covered with blood. One guard took a water hose from a nearby hydrant and directed a strong jet at [him]. A mixture of blood and water flowed down his...gaunt, naked body as he bent down repeatedly, like a wounded Cyclops...; his cries were of someone driven to insanity by pain. And then Djemo and everyone else saw clearly what had happened: the guards had cut off the man's sexual organ and half of his behind.

Hukanovic's memoir (in which he writes about himself in the third person as Djemo) and the testimony of other former prisoners overflow with such horror. Reading them, one feels enervated, and also bewildered: What accounts for such unquenchable blood-lust? This is a large subject, to which I shall return; but part of the answer may have to do with the elaborate ideology that stands behind Serb objectives in the war. In order to achieve a "Greater Serbia," which will at last bring together all Serbs in one land, they feel they must "cleanse" what is "their" land of outsiders. Founding-or rather reestablishing-"Greater Serbia" is critical not only because it satisfies an ancient historical claim but because *Serbs must protect themselves from the "genocide" others even now are planning for them*.

In this thinking, such genocide has already begun-in Croatia, in Kosovo, in Bosnia itself: anywhere Serbs live but lack political dominance. As many writers, including Michael Sells and, especially, Tim Judah, point out, such ideas of vulnerability and betrayal can be traced far back in Serbia's past, and President Slobodan Milosevic, with his control of state radio and television, exploited them brilliantly, building popular hatred by instilling in Serbs a visceral fear and paranoia.

Administering a beating is a deeply personal affirmation of power: with your own hands you seize your enemy-supposedly a mortally threatening enemy, now rendered passive and powerless-and slowly, methodically reduce him from human to nonhuman. Each night at Omarska and other camps guards called prisoners out by name and enacted this atrocity.

Some of their enemies they beat to death, dumping their corpses on the tarmac for the forklift driver to find the next morning. Others they beat until the victim still barely clung to life; if he did not die, the guards would wait a week or so and beat him again.

For the Serbs it was a repeated exercise in triumph, in satisfying and vanquishing an accumulated paranoia. As Hukanovic makes clear in his account of the first time his name was called out, this torture is exceedingly, undeniably intimate-not simply because force is administered by hand but also because it comes very often from someone you know:

"In front of me," the [bearded, red-faced] guard ordered, pointing to the White House.... He ranted and raved, cursing and occasionally pounding Djemo on the back with his truncheon....

...The next second, something heavy was let loose from above, from the sky, and knocked Djemo over the head. He fell.

...Half conscious, sensing that he had to fight to survive, he wiped the blood from his eyes and forehead and raised his head. He saw four creatures, completely drunk, like a pack of starving wolves, with clubs in their hands and unadorned hatred in their eyes. Among them was the frenzied leader, Zoran Zigic, the infamous Ziga.... He was said to have killed over two hundred people, including many children, in the "cleansing" operations around Prijedor.... Scrawny and long-legged, with a big black scar on his face, Ziga seemed like an ancient devil come to visit a time as cruel as his own...

"Now then, let me show you how Ziga does it," he said, ordering Djemo to kneel down in the corner by the radiator, "on all fours, just like a dog." The maniac grinned. Djemo knelt down and leaned forward on his hands, feeling humiliated and as helpless as a newborn....

Ziga began hitting Hukanovic on his back and head with a club that had a metal ball on the end. Hukanovic curled up trying to protect his head. Zigic kept hitting him, steadily, methodically, cursing all the while.

The drops of blood on the tiles under Djemo's head [became] denser and denser until they formed a thick, dark red puddle. Ziga kept at it; he stopped only every now and then...to fan himself, waving his shirt tail in front of his contorted face.

At some point a man in fatigues appeared.... It was Saponja, a member of the famous Bosna-montaza soccer club from Prijedor; Djemo had once known him quite well.... "Well, well, my old pal Djemo. While I was fighting..., you were pouring down the cold ones in Prijedor." He kicked Djemo right in the face with his combat boot. Then he kicked him again in the chest, so badly that Djemo felt like his ribs had been shattered...Ziga laughed like a maniac...and started hitting Djemo again with his weird club....

Djemo received another, even stronger kick to the face. He clutched himself in pain, bent a little to one side, and collapsed, his head sinking into the now-sizable pool of blood beneath him. Ziga grabbed him by the hair...and looked into Djemo's completely disfigured face: "Get up, you scum...."

Then Ziga and the other guards forced Djemo to smear his bloody face in a filthy puddle of water.

..."The boys have been eating strawberries and got themselves a little red," said Ziga, laughing like a madman.... Another prisoner, Slavko Ecimovic,...was kneeling, all curled up, by the radiator. When he lifted his head, where his face should have been was nothing but the bloody, spongy tissue under the skin that had just been ripped off.

Instead of eyes, two hollow sockets were filled with black, coagulated blood. "You'll all end up like this, you and your families," Ziga said. "We killed his father and mother. And his wife. We'll get his kids. And yours, we'll kill you all." And with a wide swing of his leg, he kicked Djemo right in the face....

In early April 1992, little more than a week after officers of the newly christened Bosnian Serb Army launched their campaign of limited conquest in Bosnia, officials in Washington began receiving reports of atrocities, among them mass executions, beatings, mutilations, and rape. Jon Western, at the State Department, then working on human rights in Bosnia, recalls that

many of these atrocities looked an awful lot like what we had heard and read about during World War II-the Balkans historically produce a lot of disinformation-and we were trained to look at them critically and decipher what was real. But as reports continued to come in..., it became apparent that they weren't just propaganda.

In fact, we were getting reports from a number of sources: eyewitnesses who had been incarcerated in concentration camps begin filtering out in summer 1992 and began giving accounts of atrocities that we could cross-reference with those from other eyewitnesses....**[16]**

As the Serbs prosecuted their "lightning campaign"-the Bosnian Serb Army of eighty thousand men, which had come fully equipped from the Yugoslav National Army, conquered 60 percent of Bosnian territory in scarcely six weeks-State Department officials compiled testimony of increasingly shocking and gruesome atrocities. Jon Western recalls that children were "systematically raped":

There was one account that affected me: a young girl was raped repeatedly by Serb paramilitary units. Her parents were restrained behind a fence and she was raped repeatedly and they left her in a pool of blood and over the course of a couple of days she finally died, and her parents were not able to tend to her; they were restrained behind a fence. When we first heard this story, it seemed very hard to believe but we heard it from a number of eyewitnesses ...and it became apparent there was validity to it.

Western and his colleagues were struck not only by the cruelty of these abuses but by their systematic nature; they very rapidly came to understand that though the Serb soldiers and, especially, the "paramilitary" troops responsible for "mopping up" were committing wildly sadistic acts of brutality, often under the influence of alcohol, their officers were making rational, systematic use of terror as a method of war. Rather than being a regrettable but unavoidable concomitant of combat, rapes and mass executions and mutilations here served as an essential part of it.

The Serbs fought not only to conquer territory but to "clear" it of all traces of their Muslim or Croat enemies; or, as the notorious Serb phrase has it, to "ethnically cleanse" what they believed to be "their" land. Of course making use of terror in such a way is probably as old- and as widespread-as warfare itself:

Houses and whole villages reduced to ashes, unarmed and innocent populations massacred *en masse*, incredible acts of violence, pillage and brutality of every kind-such were the means which were employed by the Serbo-Montenegrin soldiery, with a view to the entire transformation of the ethnic character of regions inhabited exclusively by Albanians.

This account is drawn from the Carnegie Endowment's *Report of the International Commission to Inquire into the Cause and Conduct of the Balkan Wars*, published in 1914.**[17]** Substitute the word "Muslims" for "Albanians" and the sentence could have been composed in spring or summer of 1992. Not only was the technique of "ethnic cleansing" identical, its purpose-"the entire transformation of the ethnic character of regions"-was clear to all.

The motive force driving Serbs to fight to achieve a "Greater Serbia"- or "all Serbs in one country"- depends however on a fortuitous conjunction of factors: a set of powerful historical legends combined in a cherished nationalist myth; the advent of economic hardship and the uncertainty brought on by the end of the cold war; and the rise of an ambitious, talented, and ruthless politician.

On the nationalist myth in particular Tim Judah writes splendidly, briefly describing the Battle of Kosovo of 1389, and discussing its transformation into the founding epic of the Serbian "exile." The story he tells does much to explain both the Serb obsession with the treachery of outsiders and their quasi-religious faith in the eventual founding, or rather reestablishment, of the Serbian state.

It was at Kosovo that King Lazar and his Serb knights rode boldly out to take the field against

the Turks under Sultan Murad and defend Europe against the infidel. The Serbs lost this battle-although, as Judah shows, the evidence for this is ambiguous, as it is for much of the story; they later came to blame the defeat on the (probably imaginary) treachery of Vuk Brankovic, one of Lazar's favorite knights. As Petar Petrovic-Njegos, prince-bishop of Montenegro, wrote in his 1847 epic The Mountain Wreath:

Our Serbia chiefs,
most miserable cowards,
The Serbian stock did heinously betray.
Thou, Brankovic, of stock despicable,
Should one serve so his fatherland,
Thus much is honesty esteem'd.

Judah argues that the "myth of treachery was needed as a way to explain the fall of the medieval state, and it has powerful seeds of self-replications contained within it," which have sprouted into an obsession with betrayal. (During the 1991-1995 war, Judah notes, with "monotonous regularity losses were always put down to secret deals-and treachery.")

In the last supper the night before the battle, Brankovic plays Judas to Lazar's Christ; in causing the Serbs to lose the battle, and thus their country, to the Turks, Brankovic's betrayal made way for the crucifixion of the Serb homeland itself. But, as Judah writes, Lazar's

"idea that it is better to fight honourably and die than to live as slaves" not only "provided for Serbs an explanation for their oppression by the Ottomans,"

it also identified the whole nation with the central guiding raison d'etre of Christianity: resurrection. In other words Lazar opted for the empire of heaven, that is to say truth and justice, so that the state would one day be resurrected. An earthly kingdom was rejected in favor of nobler ideals-victim hood and sacrifice-and this choice is to be compared with the temptations of Christ.

As Jesus would be resurrected so Lazar would be: and so, as well, would Serbia. This becomes a holy certainty, premised on the Serbs' heroism and their sacrifice in losing to the Turks. "That is what people mean when they talk about the Serbs as a 'heavenly people,'" Zarko Korac, a psychology professor at Belgrade University, tells Judah.

In this way the Serbs identify themselves with the Jews. As victims, yes, but also with the idea of "sacred soil." The Jews said "Next year in Jerusalem" and after 2000 years they recreated their state. The message is: "We are victims, but we are going to survive."

Milosevic himself exploits this powerful ideological view of history-Professor Korac believes that for most Serbs "it is not a metaphor, it is primordial"-as a motivating force; but he has not let it limit his own tactical flexibility. Judah rightly emphasizes that Milosevic plainly did not always believe armed conquest and ethnic cleansing central to carrying out his project

in Bosnia, for example. Well before the Bosnians declared independence and war broke out in the spring of 1992, Milosevic tried hard to woo Bosnia into remaining in what was left of the Federation-which, of course, Slovenia and Croatia having seceded (and the Serbs of the Krajina now "liberated" from Croatia and loosely tied to Serbia), was now politically dominated by the Serbs.

The Bosnians referred to Milosevic's planned state derisively as "Serboslavia" and it is no wonder they wanted no part of it; but the Serb leader's tenacious attempts to persuade the Bosnians not to follow the Slovenians and Croatians in seceding show him to be much more a ruthless political tactician than an ideologue, a distinction he would confirm by his behavior four years later when he abandoned to the "ethnic cleansing" of the Croatian army the very Krajina Serbs his National Army made such a show of "liberating" in 1991.

In the event, though, and not surprisingly, Bosnia would not be wooed. Although its inexperienced leader, Alija Izetbegovic, understood the danger of declaring independence-his nascent state, a third of whose people were Serb, might instantly collapse in war-his desperate proposals (offered jointly with the Macedonian president) to make of Yugoslavia a loose confederation were hardly of interest to Serbia, Croatia, or Slovenia. Slovenia, a small, prosperous republic with few Serbs and therefore of no real importance to Milosevic, was determined to secede, and once the Slovenes departed, the Croats were bound to follow (in fact, both republics seceded from Yugoslavia on June 25, 1991).

This left the Bosnians with a stark choice: either passively sink into a reconfigured Yugoslavia dominated by Milosevic and the Serbs, or declare independence and pray that the world would recognize the new country and somehow protect it from the onslaught to come. Izetbegovic chose the latter, imploring the "international community" to recognize his new country and to send United Nations monitors to patrol its territory and prevent the war he knew would come. After a referendum on independence was duly held in February 1992 (which the Bosnian Serbs boycotted), the "international community" in early April recognized Bosnia as a sovereign state, and gave it a seat at the United Nations. But sending troops to protect the new state, even lightly armed "monitors," was a different matter. According to John Fox, a regional official on the State Department's Policy Planning Staff at the time,

The French came to the [Bush] administration at very senior levels...once in the early phase of Belgrade's attack on Croatia, and at least once well before the military campaign against Bosnia, and they made a proposal to join with the United States, and other willing states, to put preventive peace-keepers on the ground across Bosnia-to support the legitimate elected government of Bosnia, to stabilize and prevent the outbreak of conflict, and to see Bosnia through that transition process to becoming a new independent state.**[18]**

One might consider the proposal to dispatch peacekeeping troops as either a relatively inexpensive way to prevent what seemed an inevitable and possibly horrendous war, or as a risky initiative that would involve Americans in a situation that didn't have a clear "exit strategy." In any case, Fox says, "the French never got a very clear answer." His office, the Policy Planning Staff, had proposed that the Americans join the French; but "that proposal

was not accepted."

Izetbegovic would be given no "peace keepers"; but after all he had international recognition. The Serbs were not impressed. "Milosevic couldn't care less if Bosnia was recognized," a laughing Dr. Karadzic later told a television interviewer. "He said, 'Caligula proclaimed his horse a senator but the horse never took his seat. Izetbegovic may get recognition but he'll never have a state.'" Karadzic, the self-proclaimed leader of the Bosnian Serbs, now declared, in a famous speech during the waning days of the integral Bosnian parliament in Sarajevo, "I warn you, you'll drag Bosnia down to hell. You Muslims aren't ready for war-you'll face extinction."**[19]**

He was right. By the time Cyrus Vance, the United Nations negotiator, concluded the ceasefire in Croatia on January 2, 1992, thousands of Serb troops were heading for Bosnia in their tanks and armored personnel carriers. On May 5, all soldiers and officers of the Yugoslav National Army (JNA) who came from Bosnia were taken out of the main force, complete with their equipment, and officially became a "Bosnian Serb Army" of more than eighty thousand fully trained men. Over the objections of the Bosnian government in Sarajevo, the Serb forces took up strategic positions around the country, clearly preparing for war. Jerko Doko, then Bosnia's minister of defense, explained in testimony at The Hague that

this could be seen by the deployment of units; the control of roads by the JNA; the relocation of artillery on hill tops around all the major cities of Bosnia-Herzegovina; their collaboration with extremist forces of the [Bosnian Serbian Democratic Party], arming them and assisting the arming of them.

But Belgrade retained control. "We promised to pay all their costs," said Borislav Jovic, then a close aide of Milosevic's. It was not, he said, as if the Bosnian Serbs had their own state budget to draw on. "They couldn't even pay their officers." Doko remembers the National Army commander, General Blagoje Adzic, visiting troops near Banja Luka and Tuzla toward the end of March 1992 in order to check their preparedness for the coming combat operations in Bosnia-Herzegovina.

As for the Bosnians, they were, as Karadzic said, unprepared for war. "Before the fighting," David Rieff writes in *Slaughterhouse*, "Alija Izetbegovic insisted there could be no war because one side-his own-would not fight. To have imagined that carnage could have been averted for this reason was only one of the many culpably naive assumptions the Bosnian presidency made."

The Serb leaders, on the other hand, could not have been more prepared. During the last few years a group of selected senior officers had secretly developed a military strategy to guide the "Bosnia Serb Army" in its campaign to seize control of most of Bosnia. The objectives were in turn based on ideological claims of Serb vulnerability, Serb suffering, and Serb destiny that virtually every Serb who read a newspaper, listened to the radio, or watched television would by now know by heart.

The center of the ideology remained, as it had for six centuries, the redemption of the defeat at Kosovo. In 1889, on the 500th anniversary of the battle, Serbia's foreign minister declared that the Serbs had "continued the battle in the sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth centuries when they tried to recover their freedom through countless uprisings." As Judah notes, Milosevic himself would make use of this occasion a century later to invoke "Lazar's ghost" to come to the Serbs' aid.

By this time, Milosevic was making use of an ideological program, drawn up by Serbian intellectuals, that came to be called "the Memorandum," a kind of quasi-sociological rendition of the Lazar legend. In September 1986, extracts from this document, which was drafted by sixteen eminent economists, scientists, and historians in the Serbian Academy of Arts and Sciences at the suggestion of the prominent novelist and nationalist Dobrica Cosic, had been leaked to the Belgrade press, and (in Judah's phrase) shook "the whole of Yugoslavia" with "a political earthquake."

In the key section entitled "Position of Serbia and the Serbian People," the writers launch a vigorous, bitter attack on what they call the "Weak Serbia, strong Yugoslavia" policy implicit in the "injustices" of Tito's 1974 constitution (which in effect "divided Serbia in three," by making Vojvodina and Kosovo autonomous provinces; though on Serbia's territory, they both retained a right to vote in national government institutions).

The Serb exodus from the province of Kosovo-which, as Judah shows, has amounted only to a relative decrease of population with respect to the Albanians-the writers repeatedly describe as "the genocide in Kosovo." The shift in population in Kosovo-which results from "a physical, moral and psychological reign of terror"-together with the economic and legal "hardships" all Serbs suffer daily, "are not only threatening the Serbian people but also the stability of Yugoslavia as a whole."

In the Federation's "general process of disintegration," the academicians wrote, the Serbs "have been hit hardest" and in fact the country's difficulties are "directed towards the total breaking up of the national unity among the Serbian people." Observing that 24 percent of all Serbs live outside the Serbian Republic and more than 40 percent outside of so-called "inner Serbia," the writers declare:

A nation which after a long and bloody struggle regained its own state, which fought for and achieved a civil democracy, and which in the last two wars lost 2.5 million of its members, has lived to see the day when a Party committee of apparatchiks decrees that...it alone is not allowed to have its own state. A worse historical defeat in peacetime cannot be imagined.**[20]**

The roots of Milosevic's, and Karadzic's, ideological campaigns are all here: the near-hysterical sense of historical grievance and betrayal, the resentment over Serbia's "inferior political position," the heightened rhetoric about the "genocide" of the Serbs-a term used to describe the exile of Serbs from their rightful lands but that evokes darker suspicions of the true intentions of Serbia's betrayers.

To combat these injustices Serbs are obliged to seize their fate in their own hands and achieve the long-awaited resurrection of King Lazar: "the territorial unity of the Serbian people." They must act not only to ensure their survival but to lay claim at last to an ancient birthright: "the establishment," the Memorandum says, "of the full national integrity of the Serbian people, *regardless of which republic or province it inhabits*, is its historic and democratic right."

Dominating the newspapers, television, and radio from the late Eighties onward, Milosevic and the other purveyors of this ideology brilliantly exploited the insecurities and fears of a people caught in a maelstrom of economic decline and political change. In the Serbian press all Muslims became "Islamic fundamentalists," all Croats "Ustase." As Norman Cigar writes in a chapter of his *Genocide in Bosnia* entitled "Paving the Way to Genocide," well before the actual breakup of Yugoslavia, "influential figures in Serbia had begun to shape a stereotypical image of Muslims as alien, inferior and a threat to all that the Serbs held dear."

Such propaganda, fed incessantly to a people who in many cases had been prepared for it by their own cherished historical myths, served to transform neighbors into "the other"-outsiders, aliens. And Milosevic did not find it difficult, in the bewildering world of nascent popular politics, to portray a relatively new phenomenon for Yugoslavs-the legitimate political opponent-as a mortal threat. By "isolating the entire Muslim community," writes Cigar, such propaganda would ensure that "any steps...taken against Muslims in pursuit of Belgrade's political goals would acquire legitimacy and popular support."

Such "steps" were even then being prepared. During the late 1980s a small group of officers (among them, then Colonel Ratko Mladic) who called themselves the "military line" had begun meeting secretly with members of Serbia's secret police.

By 1990, or perhaps a bit earlier-the timing here is a matter of controversy-the officers had drafted what they called the "RAM plan" which set out schemes for the military conquest of "Serb lands" in Croatia and Bosnia. The plan was called RAM, or "FRAME"-it is not known what the individual letters stand for-because it makes clear the boundaries, or frame, within which the new Serbian-dominated lands will be established. As Jerko Doko, the former Bosnian minister of defense, describes it in his Hague testimony:

The substance of the plan was to create a greater Serbia. That RAM was to follow the lines of Virovitica, Karlovac, Karlobag, which we saw confirmed in reality later on with the decision on the withdrawal of the JNA, the Yugoslav People's Army, from Slovenia and partly from Croatia to those positions.**[21]**

In their plan, the officers described how artillery, ammunition, and other military equipment would be stored in strategic locations in Croatia and then in Bosnia, and how, with the help of the Secret Police, local Serbian activists would be armed and trained, thereby creating "shadow" police forces and paramilitary units in the towns of the Croatian Krajina and throughout Bosnia. And, as early as July 1990, this is precisely what the Army began to do. In the area of Foca, according to Doko,

The JNA had distributed among the Serb voluntary units about 51,000 pieces of firearms and [among] SDS members, about 23,000..., [the Army] also gave them armoured vehicles, about 400 heavy artillery pieces, 800 mortars....

The leaders of the Bosnian Serb Army would be able to depend upon this "parallel power structure" of dedicated, often fanatical, and now well-armed men to support their troops as they carried out their campaign to conquer Bosnia. For "to conquer" here does not mean simply to subdue. In Bosnia people of different religions tended to be well mixed together; many cities in the Drina Valley, for example, adjacent to the border of Serbia itself, contained large numbers of Muslims.

The officers confronted, then, both a demographic and a strategic challenge. They must create a new state whose contiguous territory bordered the Serbian motherland-and which held most of the "liberated" Serbs. "The fact that Muslims are the majority," Karadzic said, "makes no difference. They won't decide our fate. That is our right." Serb lands were Serb lands, regardless of who happened to live there.

And thus came into use "ethnic cleansing," an ancient and brutally effective technique of war christened by the Serbs with a modern, hygienic name. In city after city, town after town, in the spring and summer of 1992, the Bosnian Serb Army and its commandos and paramilitary units launched their attacks in precisely the same pattern. It was clear these operations of conquest and cleansing were minutely, and centrally, planned. According to Vladimir Srebov, a former Serbian Democratic Party leader who read the "RAM Plan," the officers stipulated a vast program of ethnic cleansing the aim of which "was to destroy Bosnia economically and completely exterminate the Muslim people." As Srebov later told an interviewer:

The plan...envisaged a division of Bosnia into two spheres of interest, leading to the creation of a Greater Serbia and a Greater Croatia. The Muslims were to be subjected to a final solution: more than 50 percent of them were to be killed, a smaller part was to be converted to Orthodoxy, while an even smaller...part-people with money-were to be allowed to buy their lives and leave, probably, through Serbia, for Turkey. The aim was to cleanse Bosnia-Herzegovina completely of the Muslim nation.**[22]**

This plan was not fully accomplished, although it is astonishing to think that it might have been. With some exceptions, when the Serbs launched their campaign on March 27, 1992, they chose as their first objective to seize those parts of Bosnia closest to Serbia and to the (now Serbian-controlled) Krajina, regardless of who lived there. Within six weeks they controlled 60 percent of the country, and though they would later increase their gains, occupying, at their strongest, some 70 percent of Bosnia's territory-Serbs made up slightly less than a third of Bosnians-and though the fighting and shelling and skirmishing would go on, the front lines would not change dramatically during the next three years of the war.

When the Serb gunners began shelling cities and towns in Bosnia, the pattern of "cleansing" emerged immediately. Army units would form a perimeter around a town, setting up

roadblocks. Messages were sent inviting all Serb residents to depart. Then the artillerymen would begin their work, shelling the town with heavy and light guns; if defenders fired back, the Serb bombardment might last many days, destroying the town and killing most of those in it; if there was no resistance, the heavy guns might stop in a day or two. Once the town was considered sufficiently "softened up," the paramilitary shock troops would storm in, and the terror would begin.

Like the camp guards-whom they visited when they could in order to take part in torturing prisoners-the paramilitary troops had one responsibility: to administer terror. After a town had been subdued by artillery fire the paramilitaries "mopped up." Many bore on their person all the iconography of World War II "Chetnik" nationalists: bandoliers across their chests and huge combat knives on their belts; fur hats with symbols of skull and crossbones; black flags, also with skull and crossbones; and the full beard, which, as Ivo Banac says, "in the peasant culture of Serbia is a sign of mourning; somebody dies, one does not shave. This was something that happened in times of war...."**[23]**

Often the paramilitary troops would arrive at a newly conquered town with lists of influential residents who were to be executed; just as often they simply shot, or stabbed, or mutilated, or raped any resident whom they managed to find. These killers, many of whom were criminals who had been released from prison to "reform themselves" at the front, were attracted to the job by their virulent nationalist beliefs, by simple sadism, and by greed. Looting Muslim houses made many of them rich.

Many of the sadistic, high-living, and colorful paramilitary leaders became celebrities in Serbia. Zeljko Raznatovic, for example, known as Arkan (everyone knew his Serb Volunteer Guard, by far the strongest and best armed of the paramilitaries, as Arkan's Tigers), was a famous criminal-a bank robber by profession who was thought to be wanted in several European countries, in several of which he had been imprisoned and escaped.

Judah speculates that Arkan's legendary prison escapes have owed much to his longstanding contacts with agents of an espionage network run out of the Yugoslav Secretariat for Internal Affairs, for whom he reputedly worked as an assassin abroad. (His day job was running a pastry shop.) Having lately married a Serbian pop singer in a huge wedding, Arkan now is a member of the Yugoslav parliament.

Despite their flamboyance and seeming independence, Arkan's Tigers and the other paramilitaries-Vojislav Seselj's Chetniks, the White Eagles, the Yellow Ants (the name is a testament to their prowess at looting)-were creatures of the Serbian state. As Milos Vasic, an expert on the Yugoslav military, writes, "They were all organized with the consent of Milosevic's secret police and armed, commanded, and controlled by its officers."

Though it is unclear how specifically the officers described actual tactics in the RAM Plan, the similarity of atrocities committed in town after town lends credence to Beverly Allen's assertion, in *Rape Warfare*, that they debated in detail the most effective means of terror. Allen quotes one document, "a variation of the RAM Plan, written by the army's special services, including...experts in psychological warfare," that offers a chilling sociological rationale for the tactics of ethnic cleansing:

Our analysis of the behavior of the Muslim communities demonstrates that the morale, will, and bellicose nature of their groups can be undermined *only if we aim our action at the point where the religious and social structure is most fragile. We refer to the women, especially adolescents, and to the children*. Decisive intervention on these social figures would spread confusion..., thus causing first of all fear and then panic, leading to a probable retreat from the territories involved in war activity.

This is why Vasic calls the paramilitaries the "psychological weapon in ethnic cleansing." The men knew that they must be brutal enough, and inventive enough in their cruelty, that stories of their terror would quickly spread and in the next village, says Vasic, "no one would wait for them to come." He estimates that the paramilitaries consisted on average of "80 percent common criminals and 20 percent fanatical nationalists."**[24]**

Jose Maria Mendiluce, an official of the United Nations High Commission on Refugees, who happened to pass through Zvornik on April 9, was watching the paramilitaries "mopping up" the town, when he suddenly realized that "the Belgrade media had been writing about how there was a plot to kill all Serbs in Zvornik.... This maneuver always precedes the killing of Muslims." As Michael Sells, who includes this quotation in his The Bridge Betrayed, comments,

The national mythology, hatred and unfounded charges of actual genocide in Kosovo and imminent genocide in Bosnia had shaped into a code: the charge of genocide became a signal to begin genocide.

Army gunners-some of them positioned across the Drina in Serbia itself-targeted Zvornik and drove its few, lightly armed defenders out in a matter of hours. Then Vojislav Seselj and his Chetnik paramilitaries moved in.

Mendiluce watched as the soldiers and the paramilitaries did their work:

I saw lorries full of corpses. Soldiers were dumping dead women, children and old people onto lorries. I saw four or five lorries full of corpses. On one bend, my jeep skidded on the blood.**[25]**

United Nations investigators say Seselj briefed his Chetniks in a local hotel, reading out a list of the names of local Muslims who were to be killed. "Milosevic was in total control," Seselj later told an interviewer, "and the operation was planned...in Belgrade."

The Bosnian Serbs did take part. But the best combat units came from Serbia. These were special police commandos called Red Berets. They're from the Secret Service of Serbia. My forces took part, as did others. We planned the operation very carefully, and everything went exactly according to plan.**[26]**

According to the United Nations, some two thousand people from Zvornik remain

unaccounted for. As for the other 47,000 Muslims, they were expelled, many of them forced onto the roads with only what they wore. Zvornik, which had a thriving community of Muslims for half a millennium, now has none.

Sometimes the cleansing was carried out more gradually. Early in 1992, members of a small paramilitary group seized control of Prijedor's television transmitter, thus ensuring that the town received only programs from Belgrade-programs which, UN investigators wrote, "insinuated that non-Serbs wanted war and threatened the Serbs." Soon Yugoslav National Army troops, fresh from the Croatia war, began arriving in the Prijedor area. The Army officers demanded that Prijedor's leaders permit their troops to take up positions around the city, from which they could control all roads to, and exits from, the district.

It was an ultimatum. The legitimate authorities were invited for a guided sightseeing tour of two Croatian villages...which had been destroyed and left uninhabited. The message was that if the ultimatum was not [accepted], the fate of Prijedor would be the same. ... The ultimatum was accepted.**[27]**

With Bosnian Serb troops guarding all roads, Prijedor became isolated. The Serbs closed down the bus service. They required that people have permits to visit even nearby villages. They imposed a curfew. The telephones were often not working.

On April 30, in a swift, well-executed coup d'etat, local Serbs seized control of Prijedor itself. According to the United Nations investigators, the Serbs had been preparing to seize power for at least six months, arming themselves with weapons secretly supplied by the Army and developing their own clandestine "parallel" administrations, including a "shadow" police force with its own secret service.

Non-Serbs now began to lose their jobs. Policemen and public officials were the first to be dismissed, but the purge went on until even many manual workers had been fired. The "shadow" administrations already long prepared by the Serbs simply took over the empty offices.

The new Serb policemen, often accompanied by paramilitaries, began to pay visits throughout Prijedor, pounding on the doors of all non-Serbs who held licenses to own firearms and demanding they turn them in.

...The non-Serbs in reality [had become] outlaws. At times, non-Serbs were instructed to wear white armbands to identify themselves.

Finally, near the end of May, the local press-newspapers, radio, and television-began to broadcast a more hysterical version of Belgrade's propaganda, claiming that dangerous Muslim extremists were hiding around and within Prijedor, preparing to seize the town and commit genocide against the Serbs.

By now it had become quite clear what this accusation heralded. Those few Muslims and Croats who still had weapons decided to move first. As the UN investigators describe it:

On 30 May 1992, a group of probably less than 150 armed non-Serbs had made their way to the Old Town in Prijedor to regain control of the town.... They were defeated, and the Old Town was razed. In the central parts of Prijedor..., all non-Serbs were forced to leave their houses as Serbian military, paramilitary, police and civilians advanced street by street with tanks and lighter arms. The non-Serbs had been instructed over the radio to hang a white piece of cloth on their home to signal surrender.

According to the UN Report, "Hundreds, possibly thousands were killed...frequently after maltreatment." Those who survived were divided into two groups: women, children, and the very old were often simply expelled; as for the men, thousands were sent to Keraterm and Omarska, the two nearest concentration camps. Although the fighting on May 30 began a general exodus of non-Serbs-the Muslim population dropped from nearly fifty thousand in 1991 to barely 6,000 in 1993-it very quickly became clear that the Serbs were targeting for actual deportation the elite of the city: political leaders, judges, policemen, academics and intellectuals, officials who had worked in the public administration, important business people, and artists. And, after the burning of the old town, any "other important traces of Muslim and Croatian culture and religion-mosques and Catholic churches included-were destroyed."

On the morning of May 30, 1992, two heavily armed soldiers came to his door and summoned him and, within hours, Rezak Hukanovic, a forty-three-year-old father of two, broadcaster, journalist, and poet, found himself packed into a bus with scores of other frightened men, bent over, his head between his knees, peering out of the corner of his eye at the tongues of flame rising from the Old City of Prijedor. He was on his way to Omarska.

Footnotes

[1.] Roy Gutman of Newsday broke the story of the camps in his article on August 2, 1992; see his collection, A Witness to Genocide (Macmillan, 1993). But it was not until August 6, when Britain's International Television News (ITN) broadcast the first television pictures from the camps, that President Bush found himself forced to defend his "standoffish" policy toward the former Yugoslavia. See the first article in this series, "The US and the Yugoslav Catastrophe," The New York Review, November 20, 1997.

[2.] Primo Levi, Survival in Auschwitz (Simon and Schuster, 1993), p. 90. Perhaps it was this apparent absence of mortal fear, recalling the "supposed fatalism" of the Muslims, that led the SS men to coin the nickname Musulmen; or it may have been the "swaying motions of the upper part of the body," brought on by severe muscle atrophy, which the Germans thought echoed "Islamic prayer rituals." See Wolfgang Sofsky, The Order of Terror: The Concentration Camp, translated by William Templer (1993; reprinted in translation by Princeton University Press, 1997), p. 329, note 5.

[3.] Quoted in Gutman, Witness to Genocide, p. 47.

[4.] See "Omarska Detention Camp," War Crimes in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Volume II (Helsinki Watch, 1993), p. 108.

[5.] "J." worked in the kitchen at Omarska. See War Crimes in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Volume II, p. 103, and, for the earlier quotations about the beatings, p. 101.

[6.] Final Report of the United Nations Commission of Experts Established Pursuant to Security Council Resolution 780, 1992 (United Nations, 1994), Annexes, pp. 48-49.

[7.] See War Crimes in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Volume II, pp. 110-111.

[8.] See Raul Hilberg, "The Anatomy of the Holocaust," in Henry Friedlander and Sybil Milton, editors, The Holocaust: Ideology, Bureaucracy, and Genocide (Kraus International, 1980), pp. 90-91.

[9.] See Sofsky, The Order of Terror, p. 115.

[16.] Drawn from an unbroadcast section of an interview with ABC News, "While America Watched: The Bosnia Tragedy," January 1994.

[17.] Republished as The Other Balkan Wars: A 1913 Carnegie Endowment Inquiry in Retrospect with a New Introduction and Reflections on the Present Conflict by George F. Kennan (Carnegie Endowment, 1993), p. 151.

[18.] Drawn from an unbroadcast section of an interview with ABC News, "While America Watched: The Bosnia Tragedy," January 1994.

[19.] See "The Gates of Hell," Program Four (UK TX version) in The Death of Yugoslavia, Brian Lapping and Associates; Laura Silber, consultant.

[20.] See "The SANU 'Memorandum,'" in Boze Covic, editor, Roots of Serbian Aggression: Debates Documents Cartographic Review (Centar Za Strane Jezeke Vodnikova, Zagreb, 1991).

[21.] Testimony of Jerko Doko, The Prosecutor v. Tadic, case IT-94-I-T, June 6, 1996, pp. 1359-1361, in "Testimony Offered to the International Commission for the Former Yugoslavia," The Hague, June 6, 1996.

[22.] See Adil Kulenovic, "Interview with Vladimir Srebov," Vreme (Belgrade), October 30, 1995.

[23.] See Rabia Ali, "Separating History from Myth: An Interview With Ivo Banac," in Rabia Ali and Lawrence Lifschultz, editors, Why Bosnia? Writings on the Balkan War (Stony Creek, Connecticut: Pamphleteer's Press, 1993), p. 158.

[24.] See Milos Vasic, "The Yugoslav Army and the Post-Yugoslav Armies," in D.A. Dyker and

I. Vejvoda, editors, Yugoslavia and After: A Study in Fragmentation, Despair and Rebirth (Longman, 1996), p. 134.

[25.] See "The Gates of Hell," Program Four in The Death of Yugoslavia.

[26.] See "The Gates of Hell," Program Four in The Death of Yugoslavia.

[27.] See United Nations Report, Annex V, "The Prijedor Report," paragraphs 6-13, 16, 19-20.

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By Rezak Hukanovic and with a Foreword by Elie Wiesel
164 pages
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By Warren P. Strobel
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SLAUGHTERHOUSE: BOSNIA AND THE FAILURE OF THE WEST
By David Rieff 274 pages
published by Touchstone

'I am waiting. No one has ever said sorry'

In 1992 Ed Vulliamy revealed the existence of the Bosnian concentration camps. The remarkable image of Fikret Alic showed for the first time how Muslim prisoners were being brutalised by the Serbs. In the week of Radovan Karadzic's arrest our reporter returned to find Alic. In this moving despatch, he - and other survivors - tell of their anger, despair and continued attempts to try to rebuild their shattered lives

A still image from video footage showing emaciated prisoners at the Trnopolje concentration camp in Bosnia in the summer of 1992. Fikret Alic is standing in the centre, at the front. Photograph: Reuters

Most people would not recognise him now - he has a full and manly frame, and a puckish smile; he has even had his teeth fixed. But I would know it anywhere, from the mixture of mischief, a deep inward stare and that mop of hair. Sixteen summers ago next week, Fikret Alic was probably the most familiar figure in the world. His skeletal, emaciated torso and xylophone ribcage, behind the barbed wire at Trnopolje concentration camp, embodied the violence unleashed on Bosnia's Muslim civilians at the orders of Radovan Karadzic, the man due to be taken to The Hague this weekend to answer charges of genocide and crimes against humanity.

As Karadzic awaits his fate, Fikret Alic is back in Bosnia. Although currently living in Sonderberg, Denmark, he has bought a flat in a block still under construction in Kozarac town centre, and is here to save money to rebuild the nearby family home out of which he was chased in 1992, having completed the foundations. The arrest of the man who organised his torments has left a bittersweet taste.

'I am happy and I am angry,' he says. 'For 13 years, he was living protected as a free man. And for the three years before that, all the world knew what he was doing, from my camp to Srebrenica, but did nothing to stop him. So now the truth will be told, but what has happened to us all this time? Now at last I am happy just because I am alive and here, with my wife and children, and not dead like so many others. But while he was free, I was broken, too.'

I came across Fikret Alic in 1992 at the Trnopolje concentration camp, where I had gone at Karadzic's invitation, while trying to inspect the gulag of concentration camps he had set up across northwestern Bosnia - places of reputed mass murder, torture, mutilation and rape - all of which Karadzic denied, insisting: 'See for yourself.' We took up his suggestion and were directed down a seamless chain of command, first from Karadzic's doorstep to the gates of a place of horror called Omarska, then, after being bundled out before seeing too much, Trnopolje, where Fikret and others were behind the wire. They had arrived that morning, he said then, from yet another camp, Keraterm, where during a single night 130 men had been massacred in a hangar. Fikret said he had been ordered to help load the bodies on to bulldozers, but, weeping, had his place taken by an older man.

Now Fikret and I meet again, this time to celebrate the arrest of the man who orchestrated the most terrible days of his life. After the embrace, there's a hollow laugh and a pledge that next time we really must get together for another reason. We are talking in Fikret's native town of Kozarac, a place that the Bosnian Serb leader hoped to wipe from the map. As Karadzic is held in Belgrade, Friday night is getting into gear, the fairground is grinding into action, children are whooping despite the rain; music is throbbing out of bars and cars on to the warm, wet streets and girls on heels like stilts strut into town. The boys' haircuts are stiff with gel and families of three generations are out for a stroll. It could be a libidinous seaside town in Southern Europe.

Kozarac now calls itself 'the biggest small town in the world. Yet 16 summers ago this week, when I came through here on Karadzic's authority, escorted by his guards, it had been burned to the ground and the stench of charred masonry was still heavy in the air. Its inhabitants - apart from a few Serbs tending their animals as though nothing had happened - were either dead, driven out, or taken to one of the gulag of concentration camps. There was no war here in the Prijedor region of Bosnia, just a sudden, vicious and brazen attempt to eradicate an entire population by killing, incarceration, rape and enforced deportation. According to the masterplan of which Karadzic is accused, all the people on these streets this Friday night, and in these rebuilt houses, were intended to be dead, gone or never born.

But Kozarac has been rebuilt by the hard work and defiance of a diaspora, some of whom come back for the summer and others who have come back to live - albeit in the Serbian half of Bosnia, the so-called Republika Srpska. The mosques are rebuilt, too. As Edin Kararic,

a truck driver living in Watford - an Omarska survivor who has opened the Mustang bar on the main street - said to me a few years ago: 'It's not hard to get money for a mosque, but it is extremely hard work to get money to rebuild our houses. I don't go to the mosque, but I like it that they are here, because every minaret is a finger up to the people who tried to put us out. It says: We're back!'

Every year now, there is a commemoration service at Omarska, making this the gathering of a unique tribe in Europe, Clan Omarska. This year's remembrance takes place next week. A local group called Izvor, formed by camp survivor Edin Ramulic, calculates that for all the thousands of bodies already uncovered 3,205 people are still unaccounted for.

As the night unfolds around us, Fikret tells about the hunt in Trnopolje, after our visit, for anyone who talked to the press that day in 1992. He talks about how seven people had been killed for doing so, and how he had had to hide for 10 days after our meeting on 5 August, at which point he joined a convoy of deportees on a terrifying mountain exodus at gunpoint across no-man's land and into Muslim-held territory. Disguised as a woman he was saved from being taken into a group to be raped because he smelt so badly.

Later in the conflict he had tried to fight in the remarkable 17 Krajiske Brigade, based in Travnik, made up of ethnically cleansed men and women from around Prijedor determined to go home. But he kept coughing up blood and was discharged.

After living in Slovenia and Croatia he had a breakdown. 'I was talking to a tree about my time in the camps. I might as well have been in a straitjacket.' Then came a chance to go to Denmark, a meeting with a Bosnian woman from Sanski Most, near Kozarac, in 1999, 'and when I woke up, I was married,' he laughs. Work loading trucks at a slaughterhouse ended in 2000 after an accident in which a 200kg (32st) carcass fell on his back, but although he does not receive disability pension, the couple have clawed together the money to buy the lease on their flat in Kozarac, and are considering rebuilding the family home, which lies in a small hamlet, surrounded by other incinerated houses, a few returnees and their killers and torturers.

Of his persecutors he now says: 'No one has ever said sorry for what they did. I don't know what it is about these people - I can show you five killers any time we go to Prijedor. Either they are proud of what they did, or pretend it did not happen. I am waiting for someone to admit what they did, or apologise, but they do not, they never will. They have built a monument outside the camp where I was, but it is to Serbs who died, not us. I don't know of any Serbs who died there.'

The long road to Fikret, Trnopolje and Omarska - and to being back in Kozarac last week - began in London at the end of July 1992, when my colleague Maggie O'Kane and the American Roy Gutman published reports from fugitive deportees from Bosnia telling of beatings, torture and murder in the camps, among them Omarska - the place that would emerge as the second most deadly killing field in Bosnia's war, after Srebrenica.

When he invited us to visit the camps, Karadzic greeted us with that professorial, wayward air and faux academic veneer that belied his deranged vision, but left no doubts about his

authority over Omarska, promising that we would enter the camp on his word. He sent us down the chain of command to Omarska, first to his Deputy President, Nikola Koljevic, who would be our supervisor, then the crisis staff of the nearest town and administrative centre for Omarska, Prijedor. On the way there we passed the incinerated ruins of Kozarac - 'They are the people who fled because they would not accept the peace,' said our escort, Colonel Milan Milutinovic of the Bosnian Serb army.

After hours of obfuscation and failed attempts by the committee to take us to other camps that had already been inspected by the Red Cross, we set out for Omarska, eventually passing through the back gates of the camp and into another world.

A column of 30 men emerged blinking into the sunlight from the depths of a hangar. They were in various states of decay, some skeletal, with shaven heads. They drilled across a tarmac piste under the watchful eye of a machine-gunner and into a 'canteen', where they gulped down watery bean soup like famished dogs, keeping their bread roll for later. They were told they were allowed to speak freely, but they clearly dared not, the guards swinging their guns; there are few things like the burning eyes of a prisoner who dare not speak what he yearns to say. One man, Dzemal Partusic, said only: 'I do not want to tell any lies, but I cannot tell the truth.' Another, Serif Velic, replied when I asked him about a wound to his head, that he had fallen - it had happened naturally.

When we tried to get to the hangar in which the prisoners were held, we were stopped by the commandant and Prijedor's chief of police, Simo Drjlaca, cocking their guns. Time, and subsequent trials at The Hague, would tell what Karadzic wanted to hide - a nightmare of killing, torture, mutilation, starvation, drunken sadism and rape.

Like Alic, Serif Velic also joined the 17 Krajiske 'ethnically cleansed' brigade after suffering in the camps. This week, he, too, was back in Kozarac, living next to a stone marking a mass grave of 456 bodies in the nearby village of Kevljani, and pointing out another likely mass grave in the field behind his house, where the vegetation becomes suddenly uncomfortably lush.

'I was happier about the rain on my lawn than about the arrest of Karadzic,' he says. 'It's too little, too late. I have taught myself not to hate, because if I hate, that is yet another burden on my back. I want justice, but not revenge - I just want my soul to be in peace. But I cannot forgive. How can I forgive someone who shows no remorse, like Karadzic and all the little Karadzics around here who did these things to us? How can I forgive things that were done by people who are proud of doing it, would do it again and do not ask my forgiveness?'

By the end of the war, Radovan Karadzic had for three years had his hand clasped by the leaders of the Western world, as a fellow politician and diplomat. Then, suddenly, after his indictment by the newly established Hague tribunal, he became a wanted war criminal. But while our journey to the camps had taken us down the chain of command from Karadzic to Omarska over four days, The Hague's long road to Karadzic worked the other way round over 13 years, beginning with the minnows.

In 1996, while 60,000 foreign troops patrolled Bosnia, the fugitive Karadzic moved openly between his home in Pale and the Prijedor area. The first man to be arrested and delivered to the tribunal was Dusko Tadic, a parish-pump sadist from Kozarac, who had kept a café called Tibet.

Tadic had toured the camps to kill and rape at leisure, and became The Hague's first conviction, in May 1997. I had not known him, and testified as an expert witness. But I was curious about the people I had met; much was known about Karadzic by now, but not his middle management, the people we had met that day along the chain of command, on our way into Omarska. I found Deputy President Koljevic in Banja Luka; he had been a mid-ranking Shakespeare scholar before going into politics with Karadzic, but was now mumbling into his cigar about 'digging up the bones, we were digging up the bones' - though it was not clear which bones.

So, finally, in court at The Hague, the story of Karadzic's camps began to be told. Now Mark Harmon and Alan Tieger, two remarkable Americans, the latter having prosecuted Dusko Tadic at the outset, are due to bring the case against Karadzic.

The survivors' campaign for a memorial at Omarska - which is now owned by steel magnate Lakshmi Mittal, and produces 1.5 million tonnes of iron ore a year - is four years old, led by Satko Mujagic, a survivor living in Leiden, the Netherlands. Satko's foundation, Optimisti 2004, has been building sports and communal facilities in Kozarac, and he is back this week to inaugurate a gym with 49,000 euros given by wellwishers and what Satko believes to be the first and only donation ever made by the Serbian authorities to a returnee project, of 15,000 euros.

'It is one thing, and a good thing, to arrest the man, Karadzic,' he says. 'He was the big war criminal, the man with the idea for all that happened. But it is another thing to arrest the idea. Karadzic's ideas live on in the existence of Republika Srpska, and if this is all about joining the European Union, for the Republika Srpska to join the EU would be like Europe admitting a part of Germany that still agreed with Hitler, just because it is in Europe. I have rebuilt the house you are staying in now, but in 1992 it was burned while my grandmother was inside - she is one of the 3,205 people still missing - and I was taken to Omarska. No one has ever said sorry for what they did, no one has ever helped us to return and the authorities oppose outright any monument in Omarska to what they did.'

I remember Satko playing ball with his little girl against the wall of the cells where he was kept in Omarska during a visit when she was two years old. Now she is six, and Satko says: 'When I told Lejla that Karadzic had been arrested, she said that if he killed more than one man, he should go to prison for life, but in prison should not be starved like her father - no one should do that.'

Dzemal Partusic - the man who had not wanted to tell any lies, but could not tell the truth in the Omarska canteen in 1992 - has also rebuilt his home here, on a hillside in Kozarac. In the week of Karadzic's arrest, he is free and happy to talk as he feels.

'It is important that Karadzic has been arrested,' he says, above a beautiful view stretching towards Omarska. 'I see him as a second Hitler, the person who thought he could do whatever he wanted to us, and did. He was a man the world negotiated with, but I saw him as a man you cannot negotiate with. So that is good. But what are we left with?

'We can build our houses, we can show them we are back, that this is our country, but we can never get back our lives as they were before. Karadzic being arrested will not give us back our dead.'

Eventually Fikret Alic and I take a drive out of flourishing Kozarac to the hamlet where he grew up and from which he fled into the mountains, only to be captured - while most of his friends were killed. 'We found parts of their remains later,' he says. We stop at a mosque, where a plaque names the hundreds of dead from just that tiny neighbourhood. 'That is my brother,' he says, 'and that my grandfather.' We drive on, past the rebuilt houses, to the cement foundations of what Fikret hopes will one day be his home again, and where he and his mother, sisters, wife and their children were yesterday due to cook a lamb barbecue. I praise the whole, defiant miracle of Kozarac. 'Oh,' counsels Fikret in reply, 'it is not a problem to build a house. It is more of a problem to awake a dead man.'

· The following article was amended on Monday July 28 2008. In the article above we said that Mark Harmon and Alan Tieger prosecuted Dusko Tadic at the outset of the tribunal. In fact only Tieger was involved from the beginning. This has been corrected.

· The following article was amended on Wednesday July 30 2008 to remove the use of the word 'languish' in the piece.

'We can't forget'

Twelve years ago, Ed Vulliamy first revealed the horrors of Omarska, a Serbian concentration camp in Bosnia, to a stunned world. This summer the survivors returned to the place where they were tortured and raped, their friends and families murdered. He joined them

1992 footage of the concentration camp at Trnopolje. Photograph: ITN

They walk in slow procession across a field of summer flowers, through the scent of mint into the nightmare of their memories. They arrive this time as survivors, not prisoners. Or else they come to pay homage to dead relatives at this accursed place: the now disused iron ore mine at Omarska, in northwest Bosnia. In 1992 it was a concentration camp, the location of an orgy of killing, mutilation, beating and rape, prior to enforced deportation for those lucky enough to survive. The victims were Bosnian Muslims and some Croats; the perpetrators their Serbian neighbours.

They move, tentatively, on this day of commemoration among desolate, rust-coloured industrial buildings, haunted by what happened within them. Nusreta Sivac places a flower on each space of floor where her dead friends once slept in the quarters for women who "served food and cleaned the walls of the torture rooms, covered with blood" - quarters just across a hallway from the now empty office where she was, like them, serially raped, night

after night. And she passes the window from which she watched the slaughter of men on the tarmac below, day in, day out.

Satko Mujagic knows that tarmac well: his two-year-old daughter now plays with a ball on the very spot where he had been too weak to line up for bread because of dysentery, and had to be supported by his father. Later, the child picks a daisy. "You do this where your father lay bleeding," says one of the party. "Being here gives me the feeling of understanding nothing," says Satko. "The violence here was nothing to do with anything, not even war. It is unfathomable."

Young Sehiba Jakupovic, her face contorted with grief, stares around the rooms in a building called the White House from which hardly anyone emerged alive; her husband Alem was among those who perished. "I have a 12-year-old now," she says quietly, "just a baby at the time."

Nusreta tells the story of a family typical of Omarska and its legacy; one family among the thousands. "It was the night of one of their saints, St Peter," she recalls. "The guards were drunk and set tyres on fire, singing their songs and screaming as they took prisoners out to jump on them and beat them to death. One man, Becir Medunjanin, was being jumped upon, while his wife Sadeta watched from our quarters. She cried out, 'What are they doing to him?' and I tried to calm her lest she lost control and was taken out too. Sadeta was later killed as well. They had two sons; one had already been killed when they shelled the village - Sadeta always said that if she survived Omarska she would find his body to give it a proper burial. The other, Anes, survived Omarska, the only member of the family to live. He came with me just recently to identify Sadeta's body and gave his DNA. 'That is my mother,' he said."

The date of this commemoration of the camp's closure - August 6 - is branded into these people's minds. And I have a stake in all this: for the closure of Omarska followed the day after the putrid afternoon of August 5 1992, on which it had been my accursed honour to find a way into this place, along with a crew from ITN.

We saw little that day, but enough: terrified men emerging from a hangar, in various states of decay - some skeletal, heads shaven - and drilled across a tarmac yard, under the watchful eye of a machine-gun post, into a canteen where they wolfed down watery bean stew like famished dogs, skin folded like parchment over their bones. "I do not want to tell any lies," said one prisoner, "but I cannot tell the truth." And it is strange - traumatic, indeed - to stand again in that now empty canteen; strange to walk that tarmac killing ground.

It is disturbing to wander these dread buildings - where inmates were held and beaten, and whence they were called to their death; buildings forbidden to us that day in 1992, our paths blocked by armed guards and the camp commander, Zjelko Meakic, now awaiting trial in the Hague. Disturbing also to see the so-called Red House, where prisoners' throats were cut.

The feeling is all the more strange when I recognise a man I had met that day, in that same canteen: Sefer Haskic, who is now a joiner in Bolton, revisits the room into which he was

crammed. "I was trying to remember the people they killed," he says. "All my friends. They would call out the names, and men would get up, leave us, and never come back. You could hear the screaming, the killing, you could smell burning tyres and dead bodies. Next morning, there would usually be about 30 of them: the yellow truck would arrive so that other prisoners could load them up and go to dig graves. The truck would always come back, but the men who loaded it usually not. I was forever waiting my turn, but it never came - I still can't believe I'm alive." Sefer remembers in particular a night of frenzied ferocity, during which some 150 men were killed, "and the walls were covered with blood".

However, these people have not returned to Omarska only for remembrance; it is also a gesture of defiance. It was intended by the Bosnian Serbs - as has been affirmed at The Hague - that no Muslims (or rather Bosniaks - the secular ethnic term by which they are properly known) should remain on this territory alive; that they should all be deported or killed. But all around us now are the sights and sounds of a once unthinkable return by thousands of Bosniaks to the homes from which they were brutally expelled. They come back under the shadow and insignia of their persecutors, with whom they live cheek by jowl - for this is the so-called "Republika Srpska" granted to the Bosnian Serbs at Dayton in 1995. But they do so all the same.

They return also to the village of Kozarac, the site of a savage attack on May 24 1992. It was emptied of all 25,000 Bosniak inhabitants. Every Muslim house was marked in paint for incineration; the surviving Muslims herded in droves over the mountains at gunpoint. But the place is now home to more than 6,000 Bosniak "returnees", who outnumber the Serbs as they did before, with an additional 15,000 visiting from the scattered diaspora for summer. Once again, minarets - blown apart by the Serbs - nestle, rebuilt, against the hillside.

With much greater difficulty, people return also to the local seat of authority, Prijedor, where the persecutions were planned and whence orders for establishment of the camps, for the killing and mass deportation were given. In Prijedor returnees live under the cold stare of their erstwhile persecutors; but Kozarac is an effervescent, if peculiar, place. As families sit out to enjoy pizza and beer in the warm evening, so they recognise one another: a survivor of Omarska here, of another camp there, a bereaved father here, a widowed mother there. The entire community is a concentration camp survivors' reunion. Everyone here is damaged, but resilient. No life is unaffected by the maelstrom of violence.

If there is a driving force behind the return to Kozarac, it is the quietly composed figure of Sabaduhin Garibovic, who runs the Concentration Camp Survivors' Association. "We are doing this," he says, "to show the Serbs who evicted us that they did not entirely succeed. That we can come back. They never thought they would see it. They cannot fathom what we are doing."

Sabahudin's father survived Omarska, but his brother Armin was among the first to die there, his name called from among 156 men packed into the "garage", a space just five metres by six. There was no water: the men had to drink urine to live. It was so hot that the prisoners smashed an upper window to let in air, for which Armin and another man were murdered. Sabahudin himself is a survivor of Trnopolje, another camp we entered that day

in 1992: "I remember them taking out the girls to do what they would with them - six or so each night, including my niece." Trnopolje was the location for the enduring image of the war: the skeletal Fikret Alic and other prisoners behind barbed wire.

"Almost every day I see the people who did this to us," says Sabahudin. "We live separate lives - there is nothing that unifies us with the Serbs. We rely on ourselves and each other to survive." Just before our meeting, a jubilant wedding motorcade passed through town, hooting and waving the old Bosnian wartime flag. In overwhelmingly Serbian Prijedor, it was pelted with bottles and rocks. Two weeks before, a bomb had been thrown at a Bosniak-owned bar in Kozarac; a Serbian former camp guard living near Omarska was beaten up by Bosniaks. There are countless such incidents. "International foundations organise round tables to discuss living together," says Sabahudin, "but it is empty talk, and the reasons are simple: we cannot forgive or forget what happened, and they either deny it happened or say they had to do it - they were obeying orders."

Kozarac's economy depends almost entirely on the diaspora - on Omarska survivors such as Edin Kararic, who now works as a tanker driver based in Watford. Edin has managed to put some money into buying a cafe called Mustang on Kozarac's main drag, managed for him by a fellow survivor. "They drove us out," says Edin, "and we are buying it back. This cafe is my finger stuck up to the Serbs who did not want us here. In fact, that is what those minarets are, on the mosques that no one goes to: fingers stuck up at the Serbs. That is why we must come back to this place - why else would any of us want to, given what happened here?

"Mind you," he adds, pensively, "it's difficult to enjoy yourself in a place where 7,000 people are missing from a population of 25,000."

Emsuda Mujagic was among the first to come back to Kozarac, having been a refugee in Croatia. "I wanted to see in the new millennium at home," she says, "and so I came back on December 31 1999. Our house was one of the first to be destroyed in the shelling, but we rebuilt it slowly. There was literally nothing here. No birds, just snakes and a few Chetniks [slang for Serbs]. I have to stand up to their plan, which was to destroy not just a community but a whole people. That is the wish that has kept me going."

Emsuda is a survivor of Trnopolje, and on the 12th anniversary of our discovery of the camp, she takes me back to what is now a school again, closed for summer. There, sitting on the steps, Esmuda recalls how each night "the guards would just walk by and shoot or beat people while we slept in the open. Or else they would come into the women's and children's quarters with torches and read the names of young girls from a list, some as young as 10, 12 or 13. They would take them to a house where Serbian soldiers from the front would have their way with them. Some of the girls would come back, scarred and tortured - others would not, and we understood they had been tortured to death. One woman was breastfeeding her baby when they took her - she gave the child for safekeeping and came back horribly scarred."

Nusreta, who struggled to come to terms with her ordeal in Omarska, steeled herself to return to Prijedor in July 2002. By way of welcome, she found the word "Omarska" scrawled

across her doorway by her new neighbours. "At first I thought I wouldn't be able to bear it," she says. "I used to stay indoors, peeping through the curtains."

There was always a macabre intimacy to Bosnia's war - people knew their torturers and murderers - and the intimacy remains. "A lot of the Omarska guards live in my neighbourhood," says Nusreta. "I see them almost every day. One of them, called Vokic, has his entrance in the next block of flats and we share a bedroom wall. I see the interrogators and even the man who ordered that I be put in Omarska - he's a bank manager and drives a Mercedes. I try to catch his eye, but he turns away. Another has been let out from prison in The Hague - called Kvocka. Last time I looked him in the eye was when he was in the dock and I was a witness. But I often see him on the street, even on the day we went to buy flowers for the burials of five women from Omarska whose bodies had been exhumed. There he was, in the florist buying flowers for his wife. I said to my friend: 'Look, Kvocka is standing behind you. On the day the dead are buried, and thousands more are dead, he walks free.'"

Nusreta, a former judge, returned not to her own apartment but to her brother's. Why? When she emerged alive from Omarska, she explains, she found a former typist from the bench called Ankica living in her flat, and was invited in for coffee. "There I was, like someone gone mad," recalls Nusreta, "straight from Omarska and a guest in my own flat. I sat down on my sofa. Ankica, wearing my clothes, made me coffee in my pot, served in the china my mother left me, and asked me: 'Why are you acting so strange?' She said the apartment suited her, she had always wanted one like this."

Years later, Nusreta returned - as was her right under the Dayton peace plan - to be promised by Ankica that everything would be left in order. "But when I finally evicted her," says Nusreta, "it had all gone. Even the built-in wardrobe. Everything I had inherited from my mother. Even my photographs. It was pure spite, to wipe out my past." Thankfully, Nusreta has a few good friends in Prijedor, notably the only Bosniak doctor in town, Azra, whose elderly father and stepmother had their throats cut when they returned home after surviving Omarska in 1992.

"Sometimes I get a crisis in the night," says Nusreta, "that someone may knock at the door or throw a brick through my window. But I will become happier in accordance with how many of our people come back. My only wish is that by us coming home, the Serbs do not get what they wanted." However, she says by way of conclusion, "I can never again be happy."

One hallmark of the aftermath of Bosnia's war is an almost complete lack of reckoning on the part of the Bosnian Serbs. Only one defendant - the former Bosnian Serb joint-president herself, Biljana Plavsic - has pleaded guilty at The Hague towhat happened, and appealed for reconciliation. But around Omarska, the returnees' narrative falls down a black hole in the perpetrators' memory. "There was no camp here," security guards at the entrance to Omarska mine told us. "It was all lies, Muslim lies, and forgery by the journalists."

"There is no remorse," says Nusreta. "No one has apologised or even admitted what happened. They say they know nothing about the camps. There are 145 mass graves and

hundreds of individual graves in this region, and we invite the local authorities to our commemorations, but they never come." "Even now," says the Bosniak political leader in Prijedor, Muharem Murselovic, "the Serbs will not accept that anything happened. I am always in a dilemma - are they crazy, or are they pretending to be crazy? I think it is because they were all so deeply involved in what was happening that they cannot come forward and admit it."

"Every time I see a Serb who is extremist," says Sabahudin, "I remind him of what happened in front of their eyes. In such a way as I hope might change his viewpoint. He has to understand that if this country is to survive, they have to change their mind. Any future together is conditional upon them admitting what they did, and apologising for it."

The security guards from the all-Serbian village of Omarska signal that it is time for the commemorative procession to leave the camp. But as we leave, there remains one urgent question, one burning uncertainty.

Crucial to the reckoning of which Sabahudin speaks is the matter of the future of the site of camp Omarska. There is nothing to mark what happened here - the horrors are officially buried, hidden, denied. The Serbian local authorities are enthusiastically pursuing a plan to sell off the mine to overseas investors, which could result in the concealment of a mass grave, a monument to barbarity and suffering. The killing ground could become a car park. The physical memory of this evil but sacred ground could be obliterated.

Bosniak expectations are modest, and quite possibly doomed. "We would be pleased," says Sabahudin, "if there could just be some kind of memorial, maybe that the White House might be fenced off. We just want something to ensure that the memory is preserved, and in the smallest way to awaken the conscience of the Serbs. That is the really important thing. Because if we don't awaken that conscience, we might as well forget everything. And that would be the saddest thing of all - to forget what happened and what could happen again tomorrow. Yes, tomorrow.

THE ROLE OF THE PRIJEDOR AUTHORITIES DURING THE WAR AND AFTER THE SIGNING OF THE DAYTON PEACE AGREEMENT

The "Crisis Committee"and Co-Conspirators

In 1992, the "Crisis Committee of the Serbian District of Prijedor" (Krizni Stab Srpske Opstine Prijedor) was established to organize the takeover of the town by Serbs and to eliminate the non-Serb population through a systematic "ethnic cleansing" campaign coordinated with Serbian and Bosnian Serb army and paramilitary units.14 The goal of the "Crisis Committee" was to establish complete Serb control over the Prijedor opstina, to arm Serbs within that area, to block communications of non-Serbs, to destroy multi-ethnic relations in all sectors of the community through the use of propaganda (to instill within the local Serb population the fear that they were under threat from non-Serbs), to provide logistical support and production for the army through the takeover of industryand production units, and to conduct the organized and meticulous larceny of funds from non-Serbs through control of the bank, expropriation of property, and burglary.15

Crisis committees were formed in a number of towns and villages in Bosnia and Hercegovina in order to facilitate the takeover by Serb forces and authorities. The "Crisis Committee" in Prijedor, aided by many others, targeted non-Serb community leaders and business owners, many of whom were summarily executed or immediately rounded up and imprisoned in concentration camps, particularly in Omarska camp.16 During the period when such committees were being set up in various towns in 1992, the Prijedor Bosnian Serb authorities secretly began developing nine new police stations. In early April 1992, Serb police officers in Croatia and Bosnia and Hercegovina simultaneously left the established police forces to form their own police. Simo Drljaca headed the secret effort in Opstina Prijedor to create such a force. The local Prijedor police, according to numerous witness accounts and independent investigations, played a major role in violations of international humanitarian and human rights law during and after the war. Local police were often involved in paramilitary-type activities, such as armed attacks on civilians in and around Prijedor, and in interrogations and torture in the concentration camps.

A number of current officials in Prijedor were members of the Crisis Committee, including the recently-ousted but still powerful police chief, **Simo Drljaca**; current Mayor **Milomir Stakic**; the president of the local (self-designated) Serbian Red Cross, **Srdjo Srdic**; and Prijedor Hospital Director **Milan ("Mico") Kovacevic** (previously president of the Prijedor Executive Committee, or city council). According to the U.N. Commission of Experts, **Slobodan Kuruzovic**, now director of a local newspaper, was an officer in the Bosnian Serb Army, a key military figure on the "Crisis Committee" and the commander of the Trnopolje concentration camp.

Other alleged abettors in the "ethnic cleansing" include Deputy Mayor **Momcilo Radanovic** (*nom de guerre* "**Cigo**"), who has been accused of atrocities in Kozarac and in the concentration camps; **Marko Pavic**, director of the PTT (Post Office, Telegraph and Telephone); and **Milenko Vukic**, director of the electric company.17

Several police officials and numerous police officers have been accused of participation in war crimes. The civil, secret, and military police provided the camps with guards and interrogators. Joint police and military "intervention units" were used to trace and capture the non-Serb leadership. These units participated in mass killings.

According to the Commission of Experts, "members of the `Crisis Committee' ran the community in which all these violations occurred. They participated in administrative decision-making. The gains of the systematic looting of non-Serbian property were shared by many Serbs on different levels."18

A local resident of Prijedor recently told Human Rights Watch/Helsinki that the "Crisis Committee" "got rich during the war through theft and looting of those killed, and through bribery [i.e. freedom offered for cash]. They also stole businesses of those killed. That is how they got some of the businesses they have now in Prijedor. Others took that money and opened businesses or companies. Only those with connections to these guys can have a business because that is the only way to be sure you are protected."19 Those without connections or those who refuse to pay protection money run the risk of having their business destroyed or worse.

A survivor of Keraterm and Trnopolje told Omarska survivor Jadranka Cigelj in November 1992:

I blame the following for the atrocities that were committed: 1. The entire county authorities -[including] president of the county **Milomir Stakic**, medic by profession; 2. The local police forces -chief of staff **Simo Drljaca**, lawyer, and head commander **Zivko Jovic**; 3.**Simo Miskovic**, leader of the Serbian Democratic Party, a policeman from the communist era, now retired, and successor to **Srd[j]o Srdic**, now president of the Prijedor Red Cross; 4. An army representative, **Colonel Arsic**...who was in charge of the brigade which destroyed Pakrac and other Slavonian and Banian towns and villages, he participated in the events and gave orders; he and **Major Radmilo Zeljaja** practically controlled all of the events until now, therefore, the destroyed town of Kozarac is now called Radmilovo in honor of Major Zeljaja."20

Another survivor of Keraterm also mentions the names of some of those responsible for "ethnic cleansing":

I have not [yet] described here the horrible sufferings of famished, sick and beaten people, who died in the worst pain imaginable, the bestiality of guards who forced the beaten people to put their genitals in each other's mouths, the beaten up boy who died in his father's arms. According to my estimate, over 300 people were killed in "Keraterm" during my stay from June 10 to August 5, 1992. Besides the already mentioned, the perpetrators of those crimes include: **Banovic called Cupa, Kondic, Radic, Rodic, D[jo]rd[j]e Dosen called Dole, Lajic, Stojan Madzar, Civerica** and others whose names are known by their commanders. The investigators were: **Gostimir Modic, Brane Siljegovic, Ranko Bucalo, Dragan Radetic,** and **Dragan Radakovic.** Order-issuing authorities were: **Simo Miskovic** (president of the Serbian Democratic Party of Prijedor), **Milomir Stakic** (Prijedor county supervisor), **Simo Drljaca** (head of the Prijedor police), **Dule Jankovic** (the police commander) and **Jovic** (the commander of the military police).21

Dispatches, a British documentary film series, covered the story of the concentration camps in and around Prijedor in 1992 and featured interviews with survivors of the Omarska, Keraterm, and Trnopolje camps. 22 Some of the witnesses interviewed bravely named those responsible. Among those named were **Simo Drljaca**, **Milomir Stakic**, **Zeljko Meakic** [indicted], **Mlado Krkan** [Mladen "Krkan" Radic, indicted], and **Nada Balaban**. *Dispatches*also gained access to the Omarska and Trnopolje camps, resulting in powerful footage of the conditions there. The film makers went to the main office inside Omarska camp, where they met and filmed Simo Drljaca with his assistant Nada Balaban. Balaban states in the film, as Drljaca stands next to her, "This is not a camp, this is a center, a transit center. Omarska and Trnopolje. Both are centers, not camps." *Dispatches* interviewed Mayor Stakic in his office after their visit to the camps. Stakic told the crew:

Those places like Omarska, Keraterm and Trnopolje were the necessity of the moment and were formed on decisions of the Prijedor civil authorities. . .According to the information there was no mistreatment or violence in the centers themselves. . There were cases [of death] as the commander in charge let me know--natural deaths with medical documentation of death, but not of murder. . .not many [deaths occurred].

The U.N. Commission of Experts states: "It is claimed that young women from `*inter alia*,' the villages Gornja Ravska, Gornji Volar, Stara Rijeka and Surkovac together with young women from other districts were detained and sexually abused by Serbian military in Korcanica motel [Korcanica is a village near Sanski Most]. It is claimed that they were abused to `give birth to better and more beautiful Serbs.' Among the high ranking Serbian military named as rapists and/or organizers of these sexual orgies are two identified members of the `Krizni Stab Srpske Opstina Prijedor' [ `Crisis Committee of the Serb Municipality of Prijedor'], whose names are not disclosed for confidentiality or prosecutorial reasons."23

Human Rights Watch/Helsinki's investigations indicate that the "Crisis Committee" presently continues to operate in Prijedor in much the same way as it did during the war, although more informally and with some changes in the positions of individuals. This conclusion is based upon evidence regarding the continued, well-coordinated involvement of "Crisis Committee" members and their collaborators in preventing the return of non-Serbs and retaining near-total control over the municipality.

14 *Final Report of the U.N. Commission of Experts*, Annex V, Part 2, Section IX. It is important to note that the"Crisis Committee"may have been formed as early as February 1992. 15 *Final Report of the U.N. Commission of Experts*, Annex V, Part 2, Section V, Subsection C. 16 It is difficult to determine how many people died at the Omarska camp. According to Roy Gutman of *Newsday* (New York), who conducted numerous interviews with persons who were survivors of Omarska, the U.S. State Department and other Western officials confirmed to him that between 4,000 and 5,000 persons, the vast majority of them non-Serb civilians, were killed in Omarska. Some were held and killed in open pits. Thousands more would probably have died if the camps had not been closed due to international outrage. A number of detainees "disappeared" at the time of the closing of the camp. Some were later found at the Batkovic camp, having been moved there without proper notification of the ICRC, but at least 130 transferred detainees have never been found. 17 See Appendix A for a list of known members of the Serb "Crisis Committee" of Prijedor. Information about additional members has been documented by the U.N. Commission of Experts and is in the possession of the ICTY. The information is not currently available for public use. Crisis Committees were created in other towns in Bosnian-Serb controlled areas as well. 18 *Final Report of the U.N. Commission of Experts,* Annex V, Part 2, Section IX. 19 Human Rights Watch/Helsinki interview, Prijedor, Bosnia and Hercegovina, November 1996. 20 Interview conducted by Jadranka Cigelj, Zagreb, Croatia, November 5, 1992. 21 Interview conducted by Jadranka Cigelj, Zagreb, Croatia, January 8, 1993.

Although Human Rights Watch/Helsinki has not itself conducted a comprehensive investigation into the activities of all of the individuals named in this report, they have been included because they were mentioned by survivors and witnesses to atrocities (and often corroborated by other sources), and it is believed that further investigation of their activities is warranted.

22 *Dispatches*, "A Town Called Kozarac," Gold Hawk Productions, April 2, 1993. Written and directed by Ed Harriman, produced by Alan Lowery. 23 *Final Report of the U.N. Commission of Experts*, Part 2, Section V, Subsection A.

TRNOPOLJE DETENTION CAMP: HELSINKI WATCH REPORT, OCTOBER 1992-FEBRUARY 1993

In late May, part of the predominantly Muslim village of Trnopolje, in the municipality of Prijedor, was transformed into a detention camp, primarily for non-Serbian women, children and elderly persons. The Serbian authorities who administered the Trnopolje camp referred to it as a "refugee reception center" or "an open camp" for Muslims who were "hiding from Muslim extremists." Between May and August, Trnopolje was a detention camp, similar to, but less brutal than, the Keraterm, Omarska and Manjaca camps. After Trnopolje was discovered by the Western press in late July 1992 and the barbed wire that surrounded it was removed, the Trnopolje camp became, de facto, a "ghetto" or holding center for non-Serbs in the area. Most of those detained in the Trnopolje camp lived in tents, the school or other buildings within the camp's perimeter.

On the basis of interviews with former Trnopolje detainees, at least three categories of persons interned in the Trnopolje camp can be identified. The first category included those who were kept at the Trnopolje camp after Serbian forces attacked and forcibly displaced the non-Serbian population in the area. Women, children and elderly persons comprised the majority of such forcibly interned persons. The men who had been forcibly displaced from their villages were most frequently detained in the Omarska, Keraterm or Manjaca camps.

Another category of detainees included those persons, mostly men, who weretransferred to Trnopolje after the Omarska and Keraterm camps were closed. At first, these former camp inmates were separated from the rest of the detainees in Trnopolje and were frequently interned in the school, where some were beaten.

A third category of detainees included Muslims and Croats who voluntarily abandoned their villages in Serbian-occupied regions of northwestern Bosnia and came to Trnopolje, thinking it was safer for them to remain in the camp than in their homes. These people believed that they would be registered by the ICRC at Trnopolje and resettled in another country. When the camp became overcrowded, Serbian authorities deported the Trnopolje detainees from the area, at first in cattle cars and then in buses. Those taken from the ghetto were sent to Muslim and Croatian controlled areas of Bosnia.

Although abuses in the Trnopolje camp were more random and not as bestial as in Omarska, Keraterm and Manjaca, gross abuses did occur. Men were taken from the camp by guards and were subsequently "disappeared." In a few cases, detainees were shot at random by guards. Trnopolje inmates were forced to bury the bodies under orders of the Serbian authorities that administered the camp.

R.K., an eighteen-year-old Muslim student from Kozarac, and members of her family were taken to the Trnopolje camp after the fall of their village on May 27, 1992. She claims that other villages also were attacked in late May and that their inhabitants were forcibly interned at the Trnopolje camp. According to R.K.:

"About 5,000 to 6,000 people were brought in on May 27. All the villages in the area were "cleansed". They were given an ultimatum similar to ours: We had to give up or be bombed by planes. Banja Luka is only forty kilometers from us, and they had the capabilities to do something like that, so we all took the threat seriously."

"They took us to Trnopolje by bus. Then the buses turned around and came back with the men. When we got to Trnopolje, we went to the fields. We saw the buses arriving and we started to look for our men. They wanted to lock up the men in a separate room but someone fired a shot and then the men scattered into the crowd with the women. Then they started to shot in the air. They were shooting near the building to scare us."

Mehmet, a man in his fifties, said that the camp's residents were poorly fed and that many people got dysentery. He claims that two or three people died of diseases. Mehmet asserts that conditions worsened on a daily basis during his internment but that the situation improved after a visit by the ICRC.

Mehmet remained in the community hall for the duration of his fifty-day stay in the ghetto. Mehmet believes that approximately two hundred people disappeared during his fifty days in the camp:

"There was a big yard behind the community hall. The yard was full of the vehicles in which people had driven to get to the camp. A warehouse and a school also were [within the confines of the camp]. The [wire fence] enclosure was a sort of circle surrounded by machine-gun nests--you could move a little but not far, not much. sometimes it was difficult [to move] because 6,000 people were in the enclosure. They were bringing in people all the time, and the population fluctuated between 2,000 and 6,000. Every day they went through lists and pulled people out for beating or killing. I didn't see people being killed; I only saw corpses. No one tried to look or listen too much."

When asked which people were called from the lists and taken from the ghetto, Mehmet replied:

"They were looking for people who had quarreled with their neighbors and were fingered by them: teachers, professionals, rich men. Only the working class lived. People who knew how to read and write were taken away every day. No teachers survived."

Mehmet reported that the soldiers who stood guard over the detainees were responsible for "disappearing" those called from the aforementioned list. Mehmet reasoned that these soldiers were local Serbs because soldiers from outside the area would not have been able to identify the detainees.

Rasim, a former resident of the village of Brdjani, was brought to Trnopolje on May 26. One

month after his arrival, Rasim was one of at least eight men chosen to dig the graves for those who had been killed in the ghetto. According to Rasim:

"My brother, six others and I were taken by some men to a place where there were corpses on the floor. When we were digging the graves, some soldiers or guards from the camp watched us and then three police officers replaced them. There were three bodies [to be buried] and I knew two of the [victims]. One was a man named Ante, who worked in the school in Kozarac, and the other was his son, Zoran. The day before, these men [those whom they were burying] had come from Omarska. Both had the back halves of their heads missing and one had been shot through the eye. We found the third corpse in a burned-down house, near a group of burned houses. This was an old corpse; it was falling apart and the head had been bashed beyond recognition."

Rasim said that he buried Meho Krajina and Tofa Furic, both of whom had their throats slit. He also buried a third man whom he recognized but whose name he did not know; this corpse had a bullet wound in its head. All three men were buried on the same day and all had been interned in the Trnopolje ghetto. Rasim also said he buried a man named Aziz Talic, whose throat had been slit. He claims that Hase Softic, Braco Pidic and Vaskan Fazlic also were buried.

Rasim reported that the men he buried had been killed in one of the following scenarios: leaving the Trnopolje ghetto to scavenge for food, after being "disappeared" from the ghetto, or in the ghetto itself and during the "ethnic cleansing" of villages in the area.

Ismet, a forty-year-old resident of the village of Trnopolje, told Helsinki Watch representatives:

"[The Trnopolje ghetto] is not a refugee reception areaÑonly after the ICRC came, did they [i.e., the Serbian authorities] begin calling it [that]. We were first kept in the elementary school and the camp eventually spread around the school, which became its central locus point."

"The camp was about three hundred square meters and about 4,000 people were detained there [at the time of my detention]. There were guards walking aboutÑusually fifty during a given shift. The guards would walk among us in the camp and take people away from time to time, including women."

"Four men beat me that day--one was an interrogator and there were three others present. They beat me for half an hour. They kept asking me, "Where's the gun--who had a pumparica?" I don't even know what that is; later I was told that it's some type of U.S.-made gun that resembles a hunting rifle. They kept beating me."

Edin, a repairman from Kozarac, worked as a cook for about thirty-five days in the camp and claims to have gotten to know the camp authorities well. He reported that a special unit acted as "escort" for those being evacuated from the camp or as "security" guard. According to Edin:

"At the end of July, a French woman journalist driving a car with Belgrade plates came to the [Trnopolje] camp. Then more prisoners arrived. Seventy buses from Keraterm arrived. Prisoners from Omarska also arrived. Then the wire encircling the camp was dismantled on August 3. After the wire came down, we were allowed to walk out of the camp if we left our identification papers [with the guards]. The guards would ask when you would be back and you could say by 9:00, and all would be fine, but they'd tell you that if you were late you'd be butchered."

According to Edin, a bribe of one hundred German marks would buy a release form, which is the way Edin secured his release from Trnopolje on August 21. Sulejman, a young farm worker from Kevljani spent seventy-five days in the Omarska camp before he was transferred to the Trnopolje ghetto. According to Sulejman:

"In Trnopolje, we could eat by stealing from garden, finding potatoes, and so forth. We went to destroyed houses and took food from those gardens. Guards would follow us and shoot at us; it was pure luck if you managed to get away. We were provided the same amount of food as at Omarska, but we were allowed to walk about. This period lasted only fifteen days. Thereafter, they provided no food--only water--until the ICRC came. The people were sustained by scavenging, if someone could go into the village."