

Mladić Plaque in East Sarajevo: A Continuation of the Genocide

In June there were reports that a commemorative plaque honoring Ratko Mladić had been installed in the hills above Sarajevo. When I returned to Sarajevo from Srebrenica, where I had witnessed the 19th annual commemorative burials of the victims of the genocide on July 11, I made plans to locate the commemorative plaque. I had to see it, as one says, with my own eyes. The plaque is located, as is the park, on Vraca Hill, just above Grbavica. The plaque was installed in a wall that borders Vraca Memorial Park, a park that commemorates the citizens of Sarajevo who died during World War II.¹ As one climbs by car on Derviša Numića Street above Grbavica, a road sign announces that one is leaving Sarajevo Canton, and another sign announces that one is entering the Town of East Sarajevo, which is located within Republika Srpska. The plaque is on the left side of the road, just another 50 meters further ahead.

In April 1992, the memorial park was seized by the Bosnian Serbs for its value as strategic high ground from which to attack the city of Sarajevo.² The terraces of the memorial park extend to the northeast, looming above the city, and according to news reports as well as indictments based on eye-witness accounts, the park offered a position from which snipers could terrorize the citizens of Sarajevo.³ According to my sources there was a tank position located approximately 150 meters to the west of the park along Teočačka Street. So this is the historical and geographic context of the location where we find that Mladić's commemorative plaque has been installed: between a sniper position and a tank position.

Further, it should not escape our attention that this plaque glorifies an indicted war criminal who, as part of an “overarching joint criminal enterprise,” sought “to spread terror among the civilian population of Sarajevo through a campaign of sniping and shelling.”⁴ A relevant ICTY Judgement states that, “Evidence on the record also indicates that other senior members of the Bosnian Serb leadership, alleged to have been members of the JCE [Joint Criminal Enterprise], possessed genocidal intent. For example, in discussing Bosnian Muslims and Bosnian Croats, Ratko Mladić, the Commander of the Army of the Republika Srpska Main Staff, is alleged to have said that ‘[m]y concern is to have them vanish completely’.”⁵ Hence, the commemorative plaque honoring Mladić is a brutal provocation directed at all Bosniaks and non-Serbs, and, given its location, it is an insult to the memory of those who were the victims of the siege of Sarajevo, a siege that murdered over 11,500 persons, including hundreds of children.

However, this glorification of Mladić in East Sarajevo is not an isolated incident. On July 9, when 175 coffins containing the human remains of the victims of the Srebrenica genocide arrived in Potočari in preparation for the commemorative burials on July 11, a statement was released by Milorad Dodik, the President of Republika Srpska, in which he denied the ruling of genocide for Srebrenica; declared that Mladić and Karadžić were leaders in the Serb fight for freedom; and insisted that the Serbian people would continue to honor them in the years ahead.⁶ Perhaps the commemorative plaque for Mladić takes its place in a tradition that includes the glorification of Gavrilo Princip who, in the opinion of the Bosnian Serbs, was a freedom fighter and hero. A park and statue honoring Princip was dedicated recently, also in East Sarajevo.⁷

This recent crop of memorials for Mladić and Princip reminds us of the fact that in Republika Srpska, survivors of the genocide who are non-Serbs have been frustrated in their efforts to install their own memorials in memory of the victims. In Višegrad, for example, the Bosnian Serb authorities threatened to destroy or remove such a memorial in a private Muslim cemetery, and then, on January 23, 2014, they forcibly entered the cemetery under heavy police protection and ground the word “genocide” from the stone memorial. In Prijedor and Foča, sites of concentration camps and rape camps, survivors have been forbidden from installing memorials.

Moreover, the memorials to Mladić and Princip, for example, should not be understood simply as part of a Bosnian Serb “counter narrative,” as though the memorials represent “one side,” while the other side (or sides) have their own narratives. To suggest that there are two or three equivalent narratives is reminiscent of the assessments during the genocide that there were two or three warring sides whose violent acts were morally equivalent. Such an assessment was morally repugnant because it was a betrayal of the truth, and because it contributed to the policy of nonintervention and inaction on the part of the international community, inaction that led finally to the genocide in Srebrenica.

Indeed, far from being a “counter narrative,” the plaque glorifying Ratko Mladić can be seen, most significantly, as nothing less than a continuation of the genocide that was perpetrated from 1992-1995. Raphael Lemkin, who coined the term “genocide,” wrote that genocide has two phases: “one, destruction of the national pattern of the oppressed group; the other, the imposition of the national pattern of the oppressor.”⁸ The commemorative plaque in honor of Ratko Mladić is just such an imposition involving the public glorification of a man who was responsible for so much suffering, with no concern for the feelings of the survivors, no shame, and no sense of human decency. The imposition of the national pattern of the genocidal oppressor assumes that the first phase of genocide has been successfully accomplished. In other words, it assumes that the multicultural world that existed in the past no longer exists, and assumes further that the ultranationalist cultural narrative of the Serbs can now be imposed on the terrain with impunity, continuing to actively negate the world that once was.

Another example of the imposition of such an exclusionary cultural pattern involves the construction of Serb orthodox Churches in Bosniak villages in Republika Srpska. A Church in Budak, within Srebrenica municipality, for example, has been constructed in a village of Bosniak returnees, next to a secondary mass grave that has been exhumed, on the route of the peace march, and situated in such a way that the steeple looms in the distance over the Potočari Memorial Cemetery. Perhaps nowhere is the impulse to impose a separatist culture of genocide denial more obvious than in Višegrad, where, having removed the word “genocide” from the memorial, the local authorities are seeking to raze the Pionirska Street house where approximately 60 women, children, and elderly were burned alive. They seek to destroy the building in order to erase the traces of the heinous crimes, to recast the landscape and rewrite history in order to say that it never happened.

All this raises a question as to why the international community and, specifically the Office of the High Representative in Sarajevo, have been willing to permit such provocative gestures and discriminatory policies in a society in need of pathways to justice, reconciliation and healing. This is certainly not the time for inaction that would appease ultranationalist politics and cultural practices that constitute no less than a continuation of the genocide. The High Representative needs to act now to prohibit genocide denial as well as to prohibit the glorification of war criminals. These would be just two of the initiatives that the High Representative should address immediately in order to set Bosnia and Herzegovina on the path toward becoming a unified multicultural nation as well as part of the European Union. Inaction would amount to complicity in the ongoing genocide.

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Notes

1. Vraca Memorial Park in Sarajevo has been designated as a National Monument of Bosnia and Herzegovina. The official decision for the designation of Vraca Memorial Park as a national monument identifies provisions for its protection and rehabilitation. Article III sets forth two “Protection Zones” and inveighs against all actions that “might damage” or “jeopardize” the preservation of the National Monument. Accessed August 15, 2014, http://kons.gov.ba/main.php?id_struct=50&lang=4&action=view&id=2559

2. It bears mentioning that, in April 1992, the Bosnian Serbs seized the Vraca Police Academy and secured Grbavica, below the hill, for what was perhaps their most dramatic strategic incursion into Sarajevo during the siege. This is precisely what John Burns called, in an October 6, 1992, *New York Times* article, “a principle Serbian salient into the city.” John F. Burns, “Serbian Guns Resume Heavy Shelling of Sarajevo,” *New York Times*, October 6, 1992, accessed August 15, 2014, <http://www.nytimes.com/1992/10/06/world/serbian-guns-resume-heavy-shelling-of-sarajevo.html>

3. For example, see §232 of *International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia, Judgement, Dragomir Milošević* (IT-98-29/1-T), Trial Chamber III, December 12, 2007, accessed August, 6, 2014, http://www.icty.org/x/cases/dragomir_milosevic/tjug/en/071212.pdf
Another reference to an eyewitness account can be found in Goran Jungvirth’s report “Journalist Recalls Siege of Sarajevo,” Institute for War and Peace Reporting, October 8, 2011, Accessed August 15, 2014, <http://iwpr.net/report-news/journalist-recalls-siege-sarajevo>: “This week, the prosecution also called two witnesses to testify about sniper attacks on trams full of civilians in Sarajevo. Alma Mulaosmanovic described how she and others were wounded on a tram in February 1995, when she was 18. The gunfire came from the Serb-controlled areas of Grbavica and Vraca, she said. According to the witness, incidents like this happened on a daily basis in Sarajevo in 1994 and 1995, terrorising the city’s population.”

4. *International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia, Fourth Amended Indictment, Mladić* (IT-09-92-PT), Trial Chamber I, accessed August, 6, 2014, <http://www.icty.org/x/cases/mladic/ind/en/111216.pdf>

5. *International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia, Judgement Summary, Karadžić* (IT-9S-SI18-AR98bis.1), Appeals Chamber, July 11, 2013, accessed August 15, 2014. http://www.icty.org/x/cases/karadzic/acjug/en/130711_judgement_summary_rule98bis.pdf

6. "OHR mirno posmatra: Dodik najavio priznanje za Karadžića i Mladića, ponovo negira genocid i BiH," www.klix.ba, accessed August 15, 2014, <http://www.klix.ba/vijesti/ohr-mirno-posm-dodik-najavio-priznanje-za-karadzica-i-mladica-ponovo-negira-genocid-i-bih/140710004>

7. In a news article in b92 news portal, we read: “The statue was unveiled by Serb member of Bosnia-Herzegovina Presidency Nebojša Radmanović, Bosnia's Serb entity, RS, President Milorad Dodik, and the mayor of East New Sarajevo, Ljubisa Ćosić. ‘Gavrilo Princip's shot was a shot for freedom. His

shot was a prelude to what some Europeans were preparing for years, and Serbs emerged from that war as winners,' Radmanović said during the ceremony on Friday... Addressing the ceremony ... Mayor Ćosić said that Princip was 'a hero of the Serb people.' "Monument to Gavrilo Princip unveiled in East Sarajevo," <http://www.b92.net>, accessed August 15, 2014,
http://www.b92.net/eng/news/region.php?yyyy=2014&mm=06&dd=27&nav_id=90812

8. Raphael Lemkin, *Axis Rule in Occupied Europe: Laws of Occupation - Analysis of Government - Proposals for Redress* (Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 1944), p. 79.