

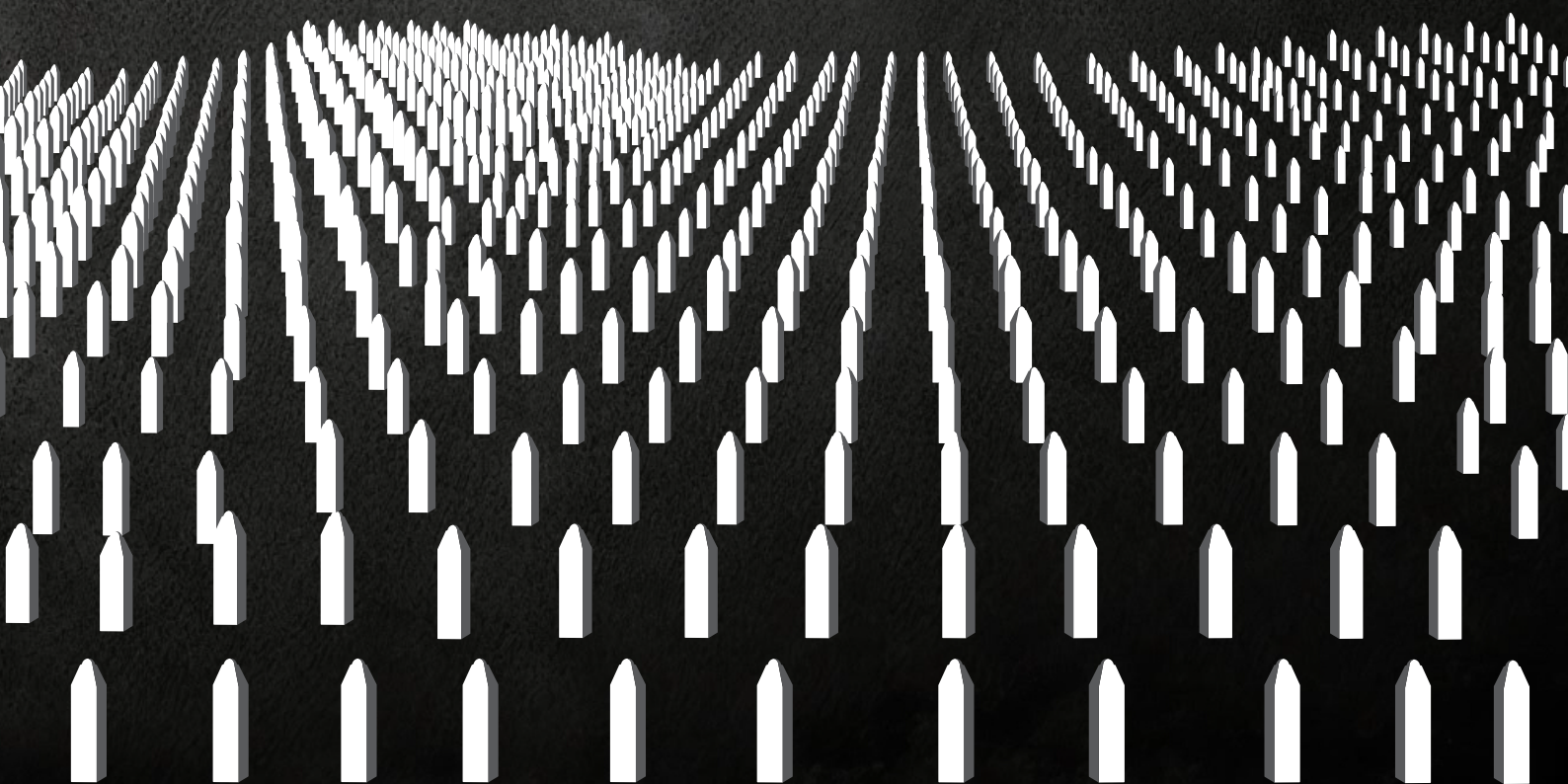


MEMORIAL
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| 30

Guidelines for Accurate Reporting and Speaking about **the Genocide in Srebrenica**

MELINA BORČAK





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1. Introduction

She took her last breath the same night she took her first. Newborn baby Fatima Muhić didn't live long enough to ever feel a single ray of sunlight. The agonizing search for her tiny remains took much longer than her life - almost 18 years. The Serb perpetrators dug out mass graves systematically, having to resort to bulldozers to move the masses of bodies once filled with life, love and individuality. They ripped the corpses into pieces and reburied the body parts separately, scattered and mangled up with others in different mass graves - over and over again, to hide the genocide. That's why - like thousands of others - it took Fatima's mother so many years to find her baby girl's tiny remains. Baby bones are like needles, the search team said. And searching for a needle in a haystack is nothing compared to searching for baby bones in a mass grave.

What remained of her tiny body was found only because she was thrown in a trash bag. On what was supposed to be her joyful, happy 18th birthday, baby Fatima was buried next to her father, grandfather, two uncles and thousands of other Bosniaks - all of them killed in a proven genocide that many journalists still struggle to even name accurately.

Her story is one of countless that are erased when the media keeps recycling the factually inaccurate and misleading, yet omnipresent phrase of "8000" "Muslim" "men and boys" killed in Srebrenica.

Eight thousand? The number is at least 8372 and the fact that many are still missing makes this distinction very important.

Muslim? Yes, they were Muslims, but their ethnic identity was Bosniak - and stripping away this fact continues the long, painful history of denying Bosniaks (Bosnian Muslims) their identity through laws, lies and bigotry.

Men and boys? Fatima was neither. She was one of around 600 female babies, girls and women whose lives and hopes were stolen in the genocide, along with the many more women and girls who suffered through genocidal rape.

The story of Srebrenica has been reduced to this short phrase of "8000 Muslim men and boys", with every single word in it misleading. If even that has gone so wrong - what else is journalism missing or misrepresenting? These guidelines will help you find out - and do justice to both Srebrenica and your profession as a journalist.

Please take your time to read and implement the guidelines and share them with others. Because when it comes to topics as serious and significant as genocide: If journalism buries the truth, it's no different than the bloody hands that buried Fatima.


2. Accurate Wording and Facts

Call It What It Is - Genocide

Let's take a look at the facts: The Srebrenica Genocide is categorized as such by genocide scholars and other experts. It has been recognized by the United Nations, the entire European Union, the USA and numerous parliaments worldwide. It is documented on hundreds of thousands of pages of court protocols, academic and journalistic texts. The fact that it was genocide is further proven by the largest forensic DNA identification project in human history.

It has been confirmed as genocide by both the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia (ICTY) and the International Court of Justice (ICJ). It is one of only three genocides in human history to be confirmed by international courts.

Despite all of this, some journalists still refuse to simply call it genocide. That is genocide denial. Whether it's driven by ignorance, ideological conviction or fear of controversy: it remains genocide denial. Calling a genocide "genocide" is not "controversial" or "confusing", but accurate.

 **Use:**
Genocide

The Srebrenica Genocide Was More Than Killing

When reporting on genocide, it is crucial to know its definition, the significance of genocide denial and relativization as well as how to recognize them, and how to use the term "genocide" correctly. Sadly, too many journalists miss the mark - and this is reflected in poor-quality work.

Genocide does not mean "mass killing". As defined by the UN Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, Article II, genocide is:

"Any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, as such:

- a. (a) Killing members of the group;
- b. (b) Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group;
- c. Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part;

- d. Imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group;
- e. Forcibly transferring children of the group to another group.”

As you can see, the Srebrenica genocide involved more than killing. It included systematic man-made famine, mass rape, the deliberate infliction of serious bodily and mental harm and the destruction of the town’s medical infrastructure. These acts meet multiple criteria under Article II. In fact, in the infamous “Directive 7”, the convicted genocidaire and terrorist Radovan Karadžić explicitly ordered the creation of conditions in Srebrenica and Žepa to make survival and life impossible for the Bosniak population - aligning disturbingly closely, almost verbatim, with the Convention’s definition of genocide

When journalists reduce genocide to a singular event or death toll, they are omitting the broader machinery of destruction - and in doing so, they fail to convey the full scope and intent of the extermination campaign.



Use:

Genocide and mention the famine, mass rapes and other crimes in addition to killing

Muslims, Bosniaks, and Bosnians

The term Bosnian refers to all citizens of the country, regardless of ethnicity or religion. In contrast, Bosniak refers to a distinct ethnic group of Muslim heritage, indigenous to Bosnia and the Sandžak region. Not all Bosnians are Bosniaks, and using the terms interchangeably is both inaccurate and politically sensitive. Bosniaks are often shortly described as Bosnian Muslims. So, writing “Bosniaks” should mean that specific ethnic group of Muslim heritage, not just anyone with a Bosnian passport.

Bosniaks are also often described in international reporting as “Muslims”. While this may accurately reflect their religious identity, it risks reducing an entire culture and people to a faith label - particularly problematic given the historical context. During the Yugoslav era, Bosniaks were legally denied their identity and only officially recognized as an ethnic group in 1971, and even then solely as “Muslims in the ethnic sense”, without acknowledgment of their historical and cultural identity. It was only with the country’s independence in 1992 that they could formally reclaim the name Bosniak.

Failing to use accurate terminology reinforces several problematic narratives:

- It continues a long and painful history of racism, disenfranchisement and exclusion. It erases the ethnic and cultural identity of Bosniaks by reducing them solely to religion.
- It disconnects them from their status as native European people, contributing to Orientalist perceptions of Muslims as “outsiders”.
- It risks presenting the group as monolithically defined by religion, rather than as a historically rooted community.

- It can be misused by genocide deniers or ethno-nationalists to question their legitimacy as a people.
- It makes it easier for genocide deniers and others to paint Bosniaks as violent, uncivilized and all the other racist tropes associated with Muslims - because the groundwork for antimuslim racism has already been laid in many people's heads and all they need to do is fill in the blanks.

At the same time, acknowledging and reporting the genocide victims as Muslims is crucial. Anti-Muslim racism played a major role in the genocide and continues to shape alliances between genocide deniers and the far-right worldwide. The mistake lies in calling the victims exclusively “Muslims” or “Bosnian Muslims”, while never mentioning the term “Bosniak”.

Also, many colleagues name the victims “Muslims” while the perpetrators in the same text are never named by religion, but by ethnicity (“Serbs”). If the victims have been identified as Muslims for decades, then the perpetrators can also be called “Christians”. It would not only be correct but also cathartic for Europe to finally identify the perpetrators as white, European Christians, rather than solely as belonging to an ethnic group that seems distant and unknown to most people on the continent (Serbs).



Use:

For genocide victims and survivors - the term “Bosniaks” and then make sure your audience understands that they are Muslims.



For others:

It is best to ask the person, as anti-nationalists prefer to be called by their historically accurate names (“Bosnian Catholics” or “Bosnian Orthodox Christians”), instead of “Bosnian Croats” and “Bosnian Serbs” respectively. Also, don't forget that the country is made up of Bosnian Jews, Bosnian Roma and other groups as well.



For everyone from the country: Bosnians

Not a Massacre, Genocide

Referring to the Srebrenica genocide as a “massacre” is both factually incorrect and harmful on several levels. It misrepresents the nature, scale, and legal and scholarly classification of the crime.

First, genocide is much more than a massacre. By definition, a massacre is the especially brutal killing of four or more people at the same time and place. When we remember Srebrenica, we don't remember four or slightly more people. We remember the more than 8372 people killed in July 1995 as well as more than 10.000 people killed in Srebrenica during its siege.

Second, the use of the term “massacre” narrows the scope of the horror to a single act or moment of violence. In Srebrenica, more than 8,372 people were executed in July 1995, but the genocide also included the siege of the town, famine, mass rapes, and the systematic destruction of civilian life. Labeling this as merely a massacre strips away the broader, coordinated intent of extermination - and erases much of the suffering endured by survivors.

To put it bluntly: If someone stole a car, broke into a house and killed everyone living in it - we wouldn't report this as “car theft”. Therefore, we do not report a genocide as a mere “massacre”.

Third, the phrase “Srebrenica massacre” is ambiguous. There were multiple massacres in and around Srebrenica during its 1992-1995 siege alone, including the Srebrenica schoolyard massacre in April 1993 that killed over 70 civilians - many of them elementary school children, killed while just trying to play football in their schoolyard. There were also many separate massacres in July 1995. Speaking of “the” Srebrenica massacre demonstrates a lack of historical knowledge and accuracy.

Fourth, euphemistic terminology has long been a tactic of genocide denial. Some genocide deniers acknowledge that atrocities were committed, but deliberately avoid using the word genocide - choosing terms like “massacre,” “tragedy,” or “crime” instead. By falsely calling it a “massacre”, you enable genocide deniers to pretend they agree with your reporting, to pretend they are not dangerous ideologues needing to be ostracized, but open-minded people belonging in the center of society. They can share your reporting and hide behind it, while never acknowledging the facts and the genocidal character of what was committed in Srebrenica.

Fifth, the persistent misuse of the term is not only misleading - it is deeply distressing and disrespectful to survivors and families of victims. Bosniak communities have spent decades advocating for accurate representation of what happened, as part of both legal redress and remembrance culture. To ignore this is to undermine their efforts and re-traumatise those already affected.

Sixth, by calling it a massacre, journalists expose a lack of understanding of relevant facts and of what happened in Srebrenica.

In short: even when journalists or commentators correctly acknowledge that genocide was committed, referring to Srebrenica as a “massacre” elsewhere in the same text dilutes the gravity of the crime and undermines the truth that survivors and allies have spent decades fighting for.

Not a Civil War, a War of Aggression

The war in Bosnia is often inaccurately described as a civil war. This framing is misleading and legally incorrect. Both the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia (ICTY) and a broad body of evidence confirm that Bosnia was subjected to external aggression, primarily by Slobodan Milošević's rump Yugoslavia (consisting of Serbia and Montenegro) in 1992, and later by Croatia in 1993.


Bosnia was already independent and was recognized as a sovereign state by the international community before the war began. It became a full member of the United Nations in May 1992 - and the war continued for years after that. Despite this, armed forces backed by neighboring states crossed its borders and carried out systematic campaigns of violence, rape, displacement, destruction and genocide.

The nature of the war was reflected in the 1995 Dayton Peace Agreement, which was not signed by local military leaders, but by the presidents of Serbia-Montenegro (Slobodan Milošević) and Croatia (Franjo Tuđman). This fact alone underscores the international - not internal - dimension of the war. If the war had been truly civil in nature, it wouldn't have been necessary to wait for the presidents of other countries to agree on stopping their attacks and local collaborators would have been the principal negotiators and signatories. The leaders of the local collaborators were not the leaders of the war. Milošević and Tuđman were.

This distinction matters. Characterizing the war as a civil war is not only factually false, it shifts focus and responsibility away from Milošević and Tuđman undermining accountability and distorting the historical record. It also minimizes the legal and political implications of the war for international actors, including those committed to upholding the rules-based international order.

In 2017, for example, international media widely reported on the dramatic suicide of a Croat war criminal in the courtroom. However, this overshadowed a much more consequential development: the confirmation by the ICTY that Croatia, under President Tuđman, had pursued a joint criminal enterprise to carve out part of Bosnia and annex it to Croatia, in pursuit of "Greater Croatia". On that day alone, six individuals were convicted for war crimes and crimes against humanity committed in that effort.

That verdict matters more than the spectacle. The crimes of ethnically Croat nationalists, aided by foreign neonazis, included murder, rape, torture, concentration camps and the use of human shields. The role of Croatia in the war - like that of Serbia - was not incidental. It was strategic, coordinated, and criminally prosecuted.

 **Use:**
War of aggression

Genocide Was Committed Against Bosniaks in the Entire Country, for Four Years

The genocide committed against Bosniaks can't be accurately understood - or responsibly reported - without understanding that the last genocide against Bosniaks started in 1992, lasted almost four years and was committed in the entire country. The genocide did not begin and end in Srebrenica in July 1995. Srebrenica was part of a wider, systematic campaign that began in 1992 and continued until March 1996.

As Dr. Emir Suljagić, Director of the Srebrenica Memorial Center, notes:

“The events of July 1995 did not take place in a historical, social, political or military vacuum. To borrow a phrase from Raphael Lemkin, we were attacked on all fronts of our existence.”

Srebrenica was, as Suljagić writes, the “center of gravity” of the Bosnian genocide, adding “Those of us who survived this attack on our physical, cultural, and spiritual existence will not allow anyone else to define that experience for us.”

The genocide encompassed far more than the executions that took place in one town over several days. It included years of siege warfare, concentration camps, forced displacement, mass rapes, torture, and the deliberate destruction of Bosniak life across the country. It was rooted in an intent to destroy the Bosniak population - physically, culturally, and spiritually.

Reducing the genocide to Srebrenica alone is a form of genocide denial. Genocide scholar Prof. Dr. Hamza Karčić has termed this “denial by localization”. This form of denial obscures the fact that genocide was committed in towns and villages across Bosnia- in places like Prijedor, Foča, Višegrad, and Sarajevo.

Although the Dayton Peace Agreement was signed in December 1995, the killings and even the Siege of the capital, Sarajevo, continued. The final withdrawal of Serb forces from Sarajevo did not occur until March 19th, 1996. Violence, murder and persecution continued well beyond the formal cessation of the war.

It would be disrespectful to the memory of the people killed in the months after the Dayton Agreement was signed to act like their killings never happened, or as if they were not part of the same genocide.

The genocide encompasses more than words could ever describe - and much more than the few days in Srebrenica or Sarajevo that foreign media focus on. What about the siege of Srebrenica in the years before 1995? The famine? The many massacres? What about everything that happened outside of Srebrenica?

Ignoring the full duration and geographical scope of the genocide is historically and factually inaccurate - and unprofessional journalism. It reduces a complex, countrywide genocide into a single event and distorts the historical record.



Use:

The last genocide against Bosniaks, from 1992 until 1996. And make it clear that genocide was committed in the entire country.

Ignorance of How Genocide Classifications Are Established

A common form of genocide denial today involves localizing the genocide against Bosniaks solely to Srebrenica, often accompanied by the excuse:

“We can’t call it genocide everywhere, because only Srebrenica was classified as such by international courts.”

This assertion is both factually incorrect and misleading.

While the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) and the International Court of Justice (ICJ) confirmed that genocide was committed in Srebrenica, this does not imply that genocide occurred only there. In fact, courts in Germany have ruled that genocide also took place in other locations in Bosnia - including Doboj, Foča, Kotor Varoš, and Osmaci (Kalesija). In 2007, the European Court for Human Rights confirmed the legitimacy of Germany’s genocide ruling in the Doboj case. This means that another international court, the ECHR, validated and confirmed the Doboj ruling as well as the Bosnian genocide convictions in German courts that were based on the same legal reasoning. Additionally, Bosnian courts have also ruled that genocide was committed in Prijedor. These rulings are legally binding and based on robust and strict evidentiary standards.

But even if none of these historic verdicts ever existed - the idea that a crime only “counts” as genocide if recognized by an international tribunal is simply false. The genocides in Rwanda, Cambodia and Bosnia are the only ones formally confirmed by international courts - yet few would dispute the genocidal nature of the Holocaust, Darfur, the Samudariyen or colonial genocides. By this logic, one would have to deny every genocide in the world - except the aforementioned three.

Srebrenica was the first time in human history that an international court indicted anyone for genocide.

The verdicts for the Genocide in Srebrenica were fought for in excruciating, painful and long battles. It is factually incorrect, but also plain insulting to reduce this achievement to a procedural footnote and pretend that the brave mothers and survivors of Srebrenica only did the basics, the minimum required for a genocide to be categorized as such - instead of recognizing that they achieved an incredible historic victory.

Equally troubling is the disproportionate burden of proof placed on Bosniaks, who were expected to legally prove genocide town by town, village by village, as though each atrocity stands in isolation. This approach erases the coordinated, nationwide nature of the campaign against them. It fragments justice and enables a narrative that treats Srebrenica as a “unique” event and an exception, rather than the culmination of a broader genocide.

This form of denial - narrowing the genocide to one location and one week in July 1995 - has been termed “denial through localization” by genocide scholar Prof. Dr. Hamza Karčić. It diminishes the scale of the crime and ignores crimes such as mass rape, forced displacement,

torture, and the deliberate starvation of civilians - all of which were part of a wider genocidal strategy.

As you can see, verdicts for genocide are incredibly rare. This means that the responsibility for confirming that something is genocide does not lie with courts but with genocide scholars and experts.

Understanding the Context in Which the Srebrenica Genocide Was Committed

The genocide committed in Srebrenica in July 1995 can't be accurately and professionally reported in isolation. It was the culmination of a wider campaign of genocide and systematic persecution against Bosniaks - one that began in 1992, following the country's internationally recognized declaration of independence from Yugoslavia.

Shortly after Bosnia's independence was recognized, the country was attacked by Serbia and Montenegro (at the time still called Yugoslavia), led by Slobodan Milošević. The same regime previously waged wars against Slovenia and Croatia, and later against Kosovo. While every single post-Yugoslav war was waged by Serbia-Montenegro, in 1993, Croatia also launched military operations within Bosnia. The objective was partitioning Bosnia between "Greater Croatia" and "Greater Serbia" - a goal supported at different times by Serbian and Croatian nationalist leadership. These ambitions were confirmed in judgments by the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY).

The war in Bosnia resulted in **the deaths of over 104,000 people**, the majority of them Bosniaks. The genocide against Bosniaks included:

- Systematic killings, including mass executions in towns such as Prijedor, Foča, Višegrad, and Srebrenica
- Genocidal rapes, with an estimated 50,000 women and girls subjected to rape, many in concentration camps specifically established for this purpose. There, they were forcibly impregnated and held captive, so they couldn't commit suicide or get abortions - instead being forced to give birth to "Serb" children
- The use of white armbands to identify non-Serbs, particularly in Prijedor - the first such use of identity marking in Europe since the Holocaust
- Concentration camps, including Omarska, Keraterm, Trnopolje, and Manjača
- The sale of Bosniak women and girls into slavery in Foča, leading to the historic legal recognition of sexualized slavery as a form of slavery in international law

- Sieges of civilian populations, including the prolonged blockades of Sarajevo, Goražde and the siege of Srebrenica prior to 1995
- Systematic torture and burning people alive
- Widespread displacement, destruction and theft of property and infrastructure
- Famine and starvation
- The deliberate destruction of medical infrastructure. Many civilians - including cancer patients, children with leukemia, the elderly, the disabled and people with mental health issues - could not get access to medicine, resulting in their deaths through suicide or “natural” causes. Chronic pain, disabilities and deep psychological trauma persist in Bosnia to this day.
- The targeted destruction of cultural heritage, including libraries, mosques and UNESCO World Heritage sites - including the largest incident of book burning in modern history, when over 2 Million Books were burned in only one night in the National and University Library in Sarajevo.
- Entire villages and towns were erased from existence, but not from memory

This is the context in which the Srebrenica genocide was committed. Not a vacuum, not a “sudden” event that “nobody could have seen coming”. Please make sure that your reporting reflects and includes this.

Important: Always report on the genocide beyond Srebrenica and mention the more than 104.000 mostly Bosniak (Muslim) people killed.

Debunking Myths: “Neighbors Suddenly Turning Against Each Other”

The phrase “neighbors suddenly turning against each other” is not only overused in coverage of the Bosnian genocide - it is also deeply misleading.

First, it was not “sudden.” The genocide against Bosniaks was the result of years of planning, incitement, and militarisation by nationalists in Serbia and among local Serb collaborators. The fact that many perpetrators had once lived peacefully alongside their victims - even posing as friends - does not make the genocide spontaneous, but all the more disturbing.

Second, it was not “against each other.” That framing implies a mutual, balanced conflict - not a genocide of one group against the other. This was a genocidal campaign carried out by

organized military forces against a targeted civilian population. Bosniaks did not systematically mobilize to kill their neighbors. They were the victims of genocide, systematic rape, mass executions, and siege warfare - not co-combatants in a symmetrical war.

This kind of vague language contributes to a dangerous false equivalence between victims and perpetrators and obscures the political and ideological responsibility behind the violence.

Finally, attributing the genocide to “ancient hatreds” or cultural predispositions toward war - as some so-called “Balkan experts” still do - is not analysis. It is bigotry. It treats people from the region as inherently violent or uncivilized and distracts from the real drivers of the genocide: ultranationalism, “Greater Serbia”, and deliberate state-sponsored violence.

Responsible reporting and historical accuracy demand that we move beyond lazy clichés and confront the reality: the genocide in Bosnia was not a breakdown of neighborly coexistence - it was a planned campaign of destruction, carried out with the intent to eliminate a people from their own country.

“Ancient Hatreds” and Nationalisms Fighting

Would we describe World War II - including Nazi Germany’s invasions of Poland, France, and other countries - as “those uncivilized Europeans fighting each other because of ancient hatreds”? Would we characterize it as “chaotic” or “everyone against everyone”? Of course not. We understand that it was a series of state-led wars of aggression, rooted in ideology, militarism, and expansionist ambition - and we report it as such.

The same standard must be applied to the wars in the former Yugoslavia.

When Milošević’s Serbia launched wars in Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Kosovo, it was not a case of “wild Balkan peoples fighting each other.” It was a series of interstate and cross-border aggressions, led by a specific regime with a clear political and ideological agenda. In Bosnia, Croatia also attacked in an effort to carve out territory - as confirmed in ICTY rulings.

Kosovo didn’t attack Slovenia, Slovenia didn’t attack Bosnia and so forth. It was not “everyone against everyone”.

Reducing the war to “ancient hatreds”, “ethnic chaos”, or “those wild Balkan people” in the “powder keg” is not only inaccurate - it is deeply offensive. These stereotypes erase:

- The agency of the perpetrators
- The suffering of the victims
- The political structures that enabled genocide

They also group victims and perpetrators into the same narrative, obscuring responsibility and distorting the historical record.

Yes, it is vital to report on the widespread, almost unanimous denial of genocide and glorification of war criminals in Serbia and the Serb diaspora. It is also important to acknowledge the mass participation and collaboration of Bosnian Serbs in the execution of crimes.

But that reporting must be grounded in facts - not in clichés about an entire region or its people.

The best path forward is not to flatten the story into stereotypes, but to enable Serbs to face the facts, instead of obscuring them behind outdated “wild Balkans” clichés where “everyone fights everyone”.

The Role of the UN and the International Community

The Bosnian War and the last genocide against Bosniaks were broadcast live and in color to audiences around the world. The facts were well known. One of the questions Bosniaks get asked most often is “How could all this be allowed to happen, while the whole world was watching?”

The short answer is: While people want to help, their governments very often don't.

The UN imposed an arms embargo on all countries of the former Yugoslavia in 1991. This disproportionately harmed Bosnia, because it had almost no weapons compared to the Serbian and Croatian armies, who inherited most of Yugoslavia's weapons stockpiles. This left Bosniaks largely defenseless during the war and genocide.

In response to Bill Clinton's question on lifting the embargo on Bosnia, British diplomats told him the genocide was “a painful, but realistic restoration of Christian Europe”. And then-president of France, Francois Mitterand was especially blunt in saying that a majority-Muslim country in Europe is “unnatural” - ignoring the fact that Bosnia is older than many European countries.

While British journalists helped uncover some of the most brutal concentration camps of the genocide, British rock stars donated for Bosnia and a British father, Graham Bamford, burned himself alive to protest his government's role in the Bosnian War, British officials repeatedly blocked efforts to help Bosnia.

Declassified documents reveal their concern was not human lives, but optics and money: “We must not allow ourselves to be identified as a country responsible for ‘the defeat of Bosnia’ (implications for our trading position etc in the Arab world).”

Britain only serves as one of many examples, as this pattern keeps repeating: While “ordinary” people felt shocked at the horrors of the genocide and wanted to help, their governments did

the opposite while trying to keep up appearances for “foreign relations” and trade.

And even two years after the Srebrenica genocide, while the wounds were even more raw than now, Boris Johnson, then a journalist, wrote in the Daily Telegraph: “All right, I say, the fate of Srebrenica was appalling. But they weren’t exactly angels, these Muslims.”

While Muslims need to be angels to get empathy after genocide, Neonazis from all over Europe and far-right extremists from Russia, Greece, Bulgaria and North Macedonia traveled to Bosnia to help “kill Muslims”, as the current Secretary General of the main German Neonazi party NPD (Heimat) openly admitted when asked about his war-time fighting for Croat nationalists. The Orthodox Christian extremists volunteered with the Army of the Republika Srpska, while the other Neonazis volunteered with Croat nationalists.

None of them were prosecuted for their roles in the genocide. In fact, many of them rose through the ranks of their organizations and became leaders of the far-right, continuing to incite hatred and even kill in other countries. Today, the vast and deep influence of the last genocide against Bosniaks on the far-right is barely spoken about.

In contrast, most people know that the United Nations failed Srebrenica in particular and Bosnia as a whole. But this too deserves a closer look:

Dutch Peacekeepers were not tragic heroes who “wanted to help, but were overwhelmed.” They destroyed lists with names of genocide victims and other evidence, drank and exchanged gifts with convicted genocidaire and terrorist Mladić, left racist graffiti on the walls of their compound.

When thousands of Bosniaks sought refuge in the UN compound, the Dutch threatened them with weapons and forced them out, directly into the hands of their killers. Even a Dutch court confirmed that they are partially responsible for the deaths of these people.

In court testimonies, genocide survivors have recounted Dutch peacekeepers standing around and doing nothing, or even listening to music, while children were being raped and beheaded in front of their mothers. But the Dutch Peacekeepers destroyed video evidence of them standing around next to executions during the genocide.

In addition to all this, Bosnia was forced to sign a Peace Agreement that effectively legalized the results of the genocide and put the country in an administrative straitjacket.

Hopefully, all of this information is a start to answer “Why did the world let this happen?”

The aforementioned governments are not the only examples of how Srebrenica and Bosnia were left to bleed.

In all of this, we want to wholeheartedly thank those countries and individuals who helped Bosniaks survive.

Avoiding Bothsideism and False Balance

Most journalists are familiar with the principle of false balance - the idea that presenting “both sides” of an issue does not always lead to accurate or fair reporting. The classic example is asking two people whether it is raining and reporting their contradicting statements, rather than simply checking the weather and then reporting the truth. The same logic must apply when reporting on genocide and war crimes, including those committed during the Bosnian War.

Phrases like “crimes were committed on all sides” or “both sides were guilty” may appear neutral. In reality, such language minimizes genocide, severely misrepresents history and promotes non-existent equivalence. In the context of Bosnia, this type of reporting is not only ethically problematic - it’s factually wrong and dangerous.

This important point applies not only to the explicit use of phrases like “all sides”, but also to vague wording or framing that creates the factually incorrect impression of a balanced war in which everyone shares equal or even comparable responsibility - instead of a genocidal war of aggression.

What the Data Shows

According to investigations conducted by the United Nations and other international institutions:

- Over 90% of war crimes in Bosnia were committed by Serb nationalist forces
- Approximately 4% by Croatian forces
- Less than 1% by all other factions combined, including the Bosnian Army
- Over 83% of civilian victims were Bosniak (Bosnian Muslim)
- In Eastern Bosnia, including Srebrenica, the figure rises to 95% or higher
- Among the 104,372 documented fatalities, only 3.8% (around 4,000) were Serb civilians - and even among those, a significant number were killed by Serb forces, particularly in areas where Serbs lived peacefully alongside their non-Serb neighbors

Even the murder of Serb civilians by Serb nationalist troops - such as the over 1.000 Serb civilians killed in Sarajevo alone - demonstrates that this ideology did not “protect Serbs,” but destroyed Serbs who wanted to keep living alongside their neighbors and resisted Serb supremacy. Likewise, obscuring the facts or downplaying Serb atrocities will not shield Serbs from judgment or animosity, but strengthen an ideology that killed them.

Disproportion, Method, and Intent

War crimes committed by the Bosnian Army, while deserving of accountability, were:

- Isolated rather than systematic
- Committed without genocidal intent
- Occurred in the context of defending a country under attack, rather than occupying or invading

In contrast, war crimes committed by Serb and Croat nationalist forces were part of well-documented, state-backed campaigns of persecution as well as genocide, including:

- Mass executions
- Systematic rape and forced impregnation
- Siege warfare targeting civilians
- Concentration camps and rape camps
- Mass deportations
- Cultural destruction and historical erasure
- The use of human shields

There is a profound difference between a state defending its population and one carrying out a coordinated campaign of extermination. To put it bluntly, there is a fundamental difference between someone who is forced to pick between awaiting their own murder or trying to defend their home - and someone making the effort to travel to a stranger's home to kill them.

Understanding this difference is essential to accurate, professional and ethical reporting.

False balance in reporting on Bosnia:

- Legitimises genocide denial
- Distorts public understanding
- Insults survivors and the memory of victims
- Undermines efforts toward accountability

Why do genocide deniers use the excuse of “crimes on all sides” so often? Much like those who reference the bombing of Dresden in an effort to minimize Nazi atrocities, some attempt to dilute the genocide in Bosnia by referencing isolated crimes by other forces. This is a tactic, not a neutral observation - and it must be recognized as such. Also: two wrongs don't make a right - especially if one of the wrongs is inconceivably worse than the other.

Previous Genocides Against Bosniaks

“The last genocide against Bosniaks” is a phrase used to distinguish the genocide in the 1990s from the many previous genocides against Bosniaks. Among them, one genocide stands out, as some survivors are still alive: The genocide against Bosniaks in World War II, committed by Serb nazi-collaborators (Chetniks) against the Bosniaks in eastern Bosnia and the Sandžak.

This was a genocide of babies: In the region of Foča, more than a quarter of the murdered Bosniaks were babies and toddlers up to the age of three. Some generations of Bosniaks have survived two separate genocides in one lifetime - in the 1940s and in the 1990s. We also must not forget the many other genocides against Bosniaks before World War II.

Using Clear, Non-Euphemistic Language

Euphemisms are inherently misrepresentative and minimize/relativize genocide. Here are key terms that should be used accurately and consistently:


1. Concentration Camps - Not “Camps”, “Internment Facilities” or similar

Bosniak civilians - including women, children, and the elderly - were held in a systematic network of concentration camps where they were tortured, starved, raped, and killed. Using vague terms such as “camps”, “internment camps”, or “penal camps” falsely implies legitimacy or neutrality - and in some cases, unjustly suggests the victims were being lawfully punished.

 **Use:**
Concentration camps

2. Rape Camps

A specific and horrific aspect of the genocide involved rape-focused concentration camps, where Bosniak women and girls were held for the purpose of forced impregnation. Bosniak (Muslim) women and girls were repeatedly raped and held captive to make it impossible for them to get abortions or commit suicide - with the goal of forcing them to give birth to the children of their Serb captors.

 **Use:**
Rape camps or rape-focused concentration camps

3. War of Aggression and Genocide - Not “Conflict”, “Hostilities” or similar

The use of terms like “conflict” suggests a symmetrical struggle or mutual hostility. In reality, the country was attacked by neighboring states in a coordinated campaign to partition the country. This was a war of aggression, and it included genocide.



Use:

War of aggression, genocide

4. The “Serb-majority RS” and “Republic”

The Republika Srpska is not a republic, it’s an entity within Bosnia. Calling it a republic is just as inaccurate as calling California a province, prefecture or canton. Similarly, just because California, Bavaria or Uttar Pradesh are states - this does not mean they are independent states or countries. The RS isn’t a republic either.

Also, calling the RS “Serb-majority” obscures the facts of how and why most people living there today are Serbs - and what happened to the Bosniaks and other non-Serbs who used to live in that part of Bosnia before the genocide. It can also imply a false sense of RS being a historically distinct region of the country - like Scotland or Catalonia. Instead of simply stating “Serb-majority”, explain that this demographic shift is recent and the result of genocide.



Use:

The entity of RS, the part of Bosnia where almost all non-Serbs were killed or forced to flee.

Avoiding Passive Language

Just like euphemisms, passive linguistic constructions can distort reality, obscure responsibility, and minimize the suffering of survivors.

For example:

Poor reporting: “She lost both brothers in Srebrenica.”

This framing is vague and passive. It treats the deaths as accidental or inexplicable, and it omits both the perpetrators and the context.

Accurate reporting: “Troops from the Army of Republika Srpska (VRS) killed both her brothers in Srebrenica.”

This version is factually specific and places responsibility where it belongs. Yes - it may require a brief explanation of who the VRS were. That is not a burden - it is your responsibility as a journalist.

This brings us to a wider issue: depoliticization. By avoiding political, ideological and military contexts, journalists risk telling an incomplete and misleading story. Genocide is never apolitical. It is carried out by organized structures, with intent, planning, and ideology behind it. Avoiding that context erases the chain of command, the decisions, and the doctrines that made genocide possible.



Use:

Active phrasing. For example “The VRS committed genocide” instead of “genocide was committed” or “took place”. Similarly, “xy killed them” instead of “was killed”, “died”

Don’t Depoliticize

Far too often, media coverage of the genocide against Bosniaks is limited to familiar imagery: mourning mothers, white gravestones, and vague references to “horrific events.” While these elements reflect real grief and loss, they alone are not sufficient to convey the scale, causes, or consequences of genocide.

One could read thousands of articles on the genocide in Bosnia and still come away without knowing the names of the political parties and ideologies responsible - many of which are still active in public life today. The term “Serb nationalist forces” is often used, but without clarity on which political movements and leaders orchestrated the genocide, and what ideological framework guided them.

Imagine reporting on the Holocaust for decades without ever mentioning Nazism or National Socialism, or explaining what those ideologies stood for. Such reporting would be seen as incomplete at best, and dangerous at worst. The same principle applies here.

Good journalism must move beyond tragedy. It must explain, at the very least:

- Who carried out the genocide
- What motivated them
- Which institutions enabled them
- Why those ideologies still matter today

In the case of Bosnia, this includes clearly naming and explaining:

- The Greater Serbia project, including the Memorandum SANU I and Memorandum SANU II
- The ideological legacy of Chetnik nationalism (one of Serbia's several Nazi collaborator movements in WWII) and how it was strengthened and operationalized in the 1990s
- The last genocide against Bosniaks from 1992 until 1996, including legal rulings by international and national courts that provided further confirmation for genocide beyond Srebrenica, beginning in 1992 in places like Prijedor, Foča, and Doboј
- The role of political parties like the Serbian Democratic Party (SDS) and others
- The genocide against Bosniaks in WWII

Importantly, it also means reminding audiences that Srebrenica was not an isolated incident, but part of a broader, coordinated genocide that lasted from 1992 to 1996. Limiting coverage to a single event in a single week of 1995 distorts the historical record and supports a denial through omission.

Understand and Report the Basics of the Perpetrators' Ideology

The last genocide against Bosniaks was not only carried out through weapons and military strategy - it was also driven by an ideological framework that dehumanized an entire population.

One of the most disturbing examples comes from Biljana Plavšić, former Vice President of Republika Srpska and a convicted war criminal, who described Bosniaks as “genetically deformed material”.

These beliefs were not isolated. They were reflected in systematic acts of rape and sexualized violence, which were extensively documented by international tribunals, human rights organizations, and academic researchers. Bosniak women and girls were held in rape camps, where forcible impregnation was used as a method of war and a tool of genocide.

Women and girls were often imprisoned in these rape camps with the goal of making both suicide and abortion impossible, thus forcing them to give birth to “Serb” children, which could “clean” the bloodline of the “genetically deformed material”. They were also subjected to conditions designed to break them physically and psychologically.

This campaign of systematic mass rape was not incidental. It was planned and widespread, as confirmed in the judgments of the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) and detailed in countless pages of legal, journalistic, and academic research.

To fully understand the context of these crimes, it is essential to examine the ideological and historical roots that enabled them. Journalists, researchers, and policymakers are encouraged to familiarise themselves with:

- The concept of Greater Serbia and its political program
- The historical role and ongoing influence of the Chetnik movement (one of Serbia's several Nazi collaborator movements in WWII)
- The SANU Memorandums I and II, key ideological texts published by the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts
- “Načertanije”, a 19th-century nationalist blueprint that shaped later expansionist policies
- Patterns of genocide denial and revisionism, including common narratives and rhetorical strategies used to justify or minimize the crimes
- The genocide against Bosniaks in WWII
- Recent events such as the Svesrpski Sabor (All-Serb Assembly) of 2024, which further highlight how nationalist networks remain active and politically influential today.

This can be complex and emotionally demanding work - and it must be done carefully. The Srebrenica Memorial Center and other expert institutions are available to provide reliable, historically informed guidance. We encourage journalists, educators, and researchers to consult qualified experts, particularly survivors and scholars from the Bosniak community (Bosnian Muslims), to ensure that coverage is accurate, respectful, and responsibly contextualized.

“Greater Serbia” and “Greater Croatia”

The Bosnian War was not a civil war, nor was it an isolated tragedy. It was the result of coordinated acts of aggression by neighboring states - primarily Serbia, and later Croatia - with the strategic objective of partitioning Bosnia between them.

This objective was confirmed through judgments issued by the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY). The court established that both the Greater Serbia and Greater Croatia projects involved systematic efforts to divide Bosnia, often through campaigns of mass violence, displacement, and genocide.

A stark illustration of this intent can be found in a statement by Momčilo Mandić, a wartime political figure who was an MP in the Parliament of Serbia even after the war. During one of the many meetings between Serbian and Croatian officials discussing the division of Bosnia, Mandić stated:

“The left side of the Neretva (river) to the Serbs, the right side to the Croats, and the Muslims down the Neretva (river).”

This chilling phrase clearly implied the physical eradication of the Bosniak population - by mass murder- from their own country.

When reporting or analyzing the Bosnian genocide, it is essential not to overlook Croatia's role in the war. Although much international attention has (rightly) focused on Serbia's central role, Croatia also carried out military operations in Bosnia that were later judged by the ICTY as part of a joint criminal enterprise to annex parts of the country in an effort to create "Greater Croatia". War crimes by the Croat side included concentration camps, the use of human shields, forced labor, rapes, massacres, torture, siege and many more - all with the support of neonazis from several European countries, who traveled to Bosnia to help their ideological brethren kill Muslims.

At the same time, the wars following the breakup of Yugoslavia reflect a pattern of Serbian state aggression. Under Slobodan Milošević, Serbia waged wars against:

- Slovenia, in an attempt to block its independence
- Croatia, including attacks on civilian areas and mass expulsions
- Bosnia and Herzegovina, including genocide
- Kosovo, where the brutal massacres against Albanian civilians ended only after NATO intervention in 1999, ending a decade of wars after Milošević and Serbia not yielding to any sanctions, boycotts or diplomatic initiatives.

These wars did not arise spontaneously, nor were they inevitable. They were the result of state-driven nationalist projects, pursued through military aggression and systematic violations of international law.

Understanding and clearly communicating the roles and crimes of both Croatia and Serbia in the war against Bosnia is vital - not only for journalistic professionalism and historical accuracy but for meaningful accountability and future prevention.

Local Serb Collaborators, Not "Bosnian-Serb Army"

As current events in Ukraine have made even more visible, individuals who support an invading power from within the targeted country are not simply actors in a civil war- they are collaborators in a war of aggression.

In the context of the 1992-1996 genocide, the term "Bosnian Serb army" or "Bosnian Serb forces" is often used in media and academic discourse. However, this phrasing can be confusing and misleading. To many readers, it may suggest a joint force made up of soldiers from both Bosnia and Serbia or imply a degree of autonomy that didn't exist in practice.

In reality, many of these forces were a mix of Serbian and local Serbs operating under the

command and direction of Serbia - including political, logistical, and military control from Belgrade. If you want to describe locals, a more accurate and responsible formulation would be:

“Local Serb collaborators”

Or: **“Local Serb collaborators under the command of Serbia”**

This language reflects the asymmetry of power and the external coordination behind the war, consistent with findings from international courts, including the ICTY.

Triumphalism and Genocide Glorification

It is widely understood in genocide studies that genocides follow a series of stages - typically outlined as ten, from classification to denial. However, in the case of the last genocide against Bosniaks, scholars have been forced to name an additional stage: genocide triumphalism.

This concept was introduced by Professor Dr. Hariz Halilović, a Bosniak-Australian academic at RMIT University in Melbourne. He defines it as follows:

“This culture of genocide triumphalism goes beyond genocidal denial - the traditionally accepted final stage of genocide. In Serbia and the Serb-controlled entity in Bosnia and Herzegovina (Republika Srpska), the Srebrenica genocide is not merely denied - it is celebrated, and its perpetrators glorified, while Bosniak survivors who return to their pre-war homes face humiliation and degradation.”

Professor Halilović further explains that this triumphalism is not isolated, but often part of coordinated institutional efforts to construct an alternative historical narrative. These efforts include:

- Celebrating unconstitutional dates such as 9 January (“Day of Republika Srpska”), despite legal rulings against its observance
- Building monuments honoring war criminals, even on the grounds of former concentration camps such as Trnopolje near Prijedor
- Undermining ICTY verdicts and reframing convicted war criminals as heroes

Alongside these state-level actions of institutionalized genocide triumphalism, social expressions of triumphalism are widespread. This includes murals of convicted war criminals across Serbia, the sale of merchandise glorifying Serb nazi collaborators and war criminals responsible for the genocides against Bosniaks in the 90s as well as in World War II, and public appearances by convicted war criminals on popular entertainment programs and reality shows. All of this reflects how normalized, widespread and accepted genocide denial and even triumphalism is among Serbs - in Serbia as well as the diaspora.

“Men and Boys of Military Age”

The commonly used phrase “men and boys of military age” in reference to the victims of the Srebrenica genocide is factually incorrect and dangerous. It implies that those killed were potential soldiers- and by extension, legitimate targets for killing.

This follows the ideological line of genocide deniers who claim the victims of Srebrenica were “enemy soldiers” and that the troops of convicted genocidaire and terrorist Ratko Mladić were simply defending themselves and/or Serbs in surrounding villages.

This framing places an entire group - men and boys, solely on the basis of gender and age - under collective suspicion. It obscures the fact that they were civilians, people who had surrendered or were seeking protection from UN peacekeepers.

Additionally, the phrase is factually inaccurate. The genocide included the killing of young boys who were clearly children, not soldiers. Linguistically turning children into potential soldiers by describing them as “of military age” contributes to a broader and historically documented pattern of racism, where Muslim, Black, and Brown boys are too often framed as older, more threatening, or more culpable than they are.

“Men and Boys”

While the Srebrenica genocide is most often associated with the mass execution of men and boys, it is important to recognize that women and girls were also among the victims - both through direct killing and through other forms of genocidal violence.

Among the people killed in Srebrenica in July 1995, around 600 were women and girls. The eldest and youngest people killed in Srebrenica were both female and both found in the same mass grave: Šaha Izmirlić was 94 years old and Fatima Muhić was a newborn who only lived a few short moments.

In addition, many women were subjected to rape, which was used systematically as a weapon of war and genocide. These crimes were part of the broader genocidal campaign - targeting not just bodies, but the community’s survival and dignity.

It’s also essential to recognize that Srebrenica was under siege from 1992 to 1995. More than 2000 people were killed during this period, before July 1995. Many of them were women and girls, killed by shelling, starvation, or sniper fire.

Understanding genocide requires looking beyond the mass executions alone. It means acknowledging and reporting the full spectrum of genocidal violence - including starvation, rape, trauma, and the targeted destruction of families and communities. Women and girls were not bystanders to the genocide - they were direct victims.

Avoiding the Term “Ethnic Cleansing”

Every genocide is accompanied by language designed to obscure it - euphemisms and code words used by perpetrators to sanitize the violence and dehumanize victims. Usually, such language isn't uncritically used and reproduced.

We do not refer to the Holocaust as the “Final Solution.”

We do not describe the Samudaripen as “Fighting G*psies.”

We do not refer to the genocide against the Tutsis as “killing cockroaches.”

In the same way, we shouldn't describe the 1992–1996 genocide against Bosniaks as “ethnic cleansing.”

The term “ethnic cleansing” was popularized by the perpetrators to present acts of genocide, mass deportation, sexual violence, and extermination in clinical or strategic terms. It has no legal standing in international criminal law. It is not defined in the Rome Statute or any other foundational legal text, and its widespread adoption has done significant harm to efforts to recognize - and therefore to prevent - several genocides. Describing genocides as mere “ethnic cleansing” has become a tactic of perpetrators and a mistake of “neutral” people afraid of controversy.

To make matters worse and more embarrassing, the phrase isn't even translated correctly. Etničko čišćenje more accurately translates to ethnic cleaning - a phrase even more disturbing, and a clearer reflection of the dehumanizing logic behind it, which sees Bosniaks as nothing but dirt. Even while translating a euphemism for genocide, it was translated with another euphemism. This phrase maximizes how minimized genocide can be. That this term - with its false translation and false representation of facts - entered global media discourse and even academia illustrates how effectively language can be used to minimize atrocities - and how little the voices of Bosniaks were listened to.

Some still insist that ‘ethnic cleansing’ is a real phenomenon that cannot be covered by terms like genocide, mass deportations, or combinations like ‘mass deportations and war crimes.’ This is not true - everything that this phrase expresses can be easily described with existing terms.

When referring to the last genocide committed against Bosniaks, the appropriate terminology is:

“The last genocide against Bosniaks”

Or “**Agresija**”, meaning aggression - used to describe both the genocide and the broader war of aggression waged by Serbia, Croatia, and their local collaborators.

Agresija: Not “The Yugoslav War,” “Balkan War,” or “Fratricidal War”


There was no single “Yugoslav War.” What took place in the 1990s was a series of distinct wars, launched by the regime of Slobodan Milošević in what remained of Yugoslavia - primarily Serbia and Montenegro. These wars targeted Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and later Kosovo, each separately and successively. Additionally, Croatia launched its own military campaign into Bosnia in 1993. This was not a single internal conflict, but a sequence of interstate wars of aggression.

Referring to these wars as a single “Yugoslav War” oversimplifies the historical record and often serves to blur the question of responsibility. Such framing risks aligning, even inadvertently, with narratives promoted by perpetrators or their ideological supporters, who benefit from portraying the wars and genocide as chaotic, mutual, and symmetrical.

Similarly, the term “Balkan War(s)” is inaccurate in this context. The Balkan Wars took place more than 100 years ago and using the same terminology for the 1990s wars is ahistorical.

The term “fratricidal war” appears neutral or even compassionate, but it obscures power asymmetries and ideologically driven aggression. Please understand that not all nationalisms work the same way. While “Western” nationalisms tend to exclude hated groups, others function by absorbing and appropriating. Russian nationalists, for example, insist that Ukraine is part of Russia and that Ukrainians don’t exist as a people. So when you hear a Russian nationalist saying that Russians and Ukrainians are “the same” or “like brothers” - this isn’t the peaceful, lovely statement it appears to be. “We are the same” can mean “they are Russians, so we are entitled to their country”. The same thing happens to Bosniaks: Depending on which nationalist ideologue you ask, they are either just “Muslim Serbs” or “Muslim Croats.” This kind of rhetoric is used to justify territorial claims and so-called “honorable” wars of aggression.

“Fratricidal war” erases identity and justifies conquest, while hiding behind the flowery language of cultural closeness or familial ties. Describing such wars as “fratricidal” suggests moral equivalence, and downplays the reality that Bosniaks were targeted, dehumanized, and simultaneously claimed as belonging to their oppressors.

 **Use:**
War of aggression

Avoiding Factually Inaccurate Terms Like “Paramilitaries”

We often read about Serb “paramilitaries” committing the genocide in Srebrenica. No, they were regular units under the direct command of the Interior Ministry of Serbia, and units of the Army of the self-proclaimed “Serb Republic” - also under the control of and working with Serbia. Talk of “paramilitaries” is factually incorrect and shifts the responsibility away from the state of Serbia.

Yugoslavia Is Dead

Bosnia is older than many European countries and has existed for over a thousand years. Yugoslavia, while pretty recent, is just a short blip in Bosnia's history. Be careful not to fall into the trap of recency bias by assigning Yugoslavia more significance than it has.

More than 100.000 people died in the Bosnian War, but in the end, the country was able to defend its independence. Therefore, referring to people from Bosnia as 'ex-Yugoslavs' or as being 'from the former Yugoslavia' reflects a troubling lack of awareness regarding the long and painful history of erasing Bosnian and Bosniak identities - and Bosniaks as a people.

3. Practical Considerations

Prioritizing Bosniak Voices – and Knowing the Difference Between Bosniaks and Bosnians

“Nothing about us without us” - for decades, this has been the guiding principle of respectful journalistic and human rights work. You can not write, report, film documentaries about Bosniaks without Bosniaks. Any journalistic works or events (panels, talk shows, conferences and similar) must include the voices of those affected. There are plenty of Bosniak genocide survivors, experts and genocide survivors who are experts. It’s a privilege and honor to be able to learn from people so close to history - live and in color, not through dusty books and museums.

But too often, documentaries, panels, talk shows, conferences, and even recommended reading lists on Bosnia and the last genocide proceed without a single Bosniak voice, or with only token representation, outnumbered by international “Balkan experts.” This not only excludes the people most qualified to speak - it reinforces existing power imbalances in knowledge production and remembrance culture.

And when journalists or organizers are made aware of this, sometimes they try to fix it by inviting Bosnian Serbs instead of Bosnian Muslims - because they do not understand the difference between Bosniaks and Bosnians. Again, Bosniaks (Bosnian Muslims) are an ethnic group native to Bosnia and the Sandžak, while Bosnians are all citizens of Bosnia, including Bosnian Serbs, Croats, Albanians, Roma and others.

To illustrate the issue: We would not invite white South Africans to represent victims of Apartheid, just because they are South African, or non-Jewish Germans to speak on behalf of Holocaust survivors because that’s where it started. So how come Serbs and other non-Bosniaks are so often invited to cosplay victims of the genocide? Three decades after the genocide, it is shocking and deeply concerning how many journalists still don’t know the difference between victims and perpetrators - or fail to center those most impacted.

Recognizing who has Expertise

Eksperti za genocid su oni ljudi koji se u svom radu godinama isključivo ili pretežno bave posljednjim genocidom nad Bošnjacima. Eksperti nisu ni u kom slučaju “balkanski stručnjaci”, istraživači slavistike, profesori jugoistočnoevropskih studija, dopisnici za Balkan ili drugi koji se bave tako širokim oblastima.

Experts on the genocide are those people who, in their work, have dealt exclusively or predominantly with the last genocide against Bosniaks for years. Experts are explicitly not

“Balkan experts,” Slavic studies researchers, professors of Southeast European studies, Balkan correspondents, or others who deal with such broader fields.

Just translate this into a context you know: If it was about the Berlin Wall or the Second World War, would you consult “Central Europe experts” as if they had expertise on the history, politics, societies, and culture of half a dozen countries? Or German studies professors who know a lot about Goethe but far from enough about the Berlin Wall? No. You would ask historians, genocide researchers, journalists, or sociologists with exactly this professional focus – not “Central Europe correspondents” or similar.

There are so many people who dedicate their entire careers to the memory of the last genocide against Bosniaks – and your journalistic contributions will be of much higher quality if you consult or collaborate with these experts.

Using Representative Imagery and Visuals

It is very noticeable that non-Bosnian media have visually reduced the Genocide in Srebrenica to pictures of the memorial graves in Potočari, sometimes with an elderly woman crying among the graves.

While this is part of the story, it is just that - a part.

Why are the survivors seen in such pictures almost always elderly? What about the young survivors, still in their 30s, crying at the graves of their families while deeply traumatized for life?

By not showing young survivors, the genocide is framed as something that happened a long, long time ago and as such, doesn’t need to be remembered as much, since it is in the far past. Even if it is unintentional, visually framing the genocide as the far past devalues its meaning for current events and our current societies.

To top it off: The story of the Genocide can not be visually told through one motif. Where are pictures and videos of mass graves, of the death march, of exhausted refugees arriving in Tuzla? The pictures of walls covered either in blood or in racist graffiti left by Dutch peacekeepers? The pictures of destroyed homes, hospitals and heritage? Where are pictures of the siege of Srebrenica, the years of suffering before July 1995?

The story of Srebrenica is not one image, but thousands - and they deserve to be seen.

Using Appropriate Audio Materials

Documentaries and reports on the Srebrenica genocide - and Bosnia more broadly - too often feature background music that is Arabic, Turkish, or generically “oriental” in tone.

This choice reinforces a reductive portrayal of Bosniaks as solely defined by their Muslim identity and as culturally “other.”

Bosnia has its own music - you can even find it in the list of UNESCO Intangible World Heritage.

We wouldn’t use flamenco in a piece about Germany, or Swiss yodeling in a documentary about Australia - just because they are predominantly Christian and white. The use of “oriental” music unrelated to Bosnia exposes the fact that the journalist in question sees and understands Bosniaks solely through the lens of religious and cultural foreignness, rather than as European citizens targeted in a genocide on European soil.

Expecting or Pressuring Bosniaks to Be “Perfect Victims”

Survivors of genocide are often asked whether they have forgiven the perpetrators or what they are doing to support “reconciliation.” These questions reflect a limited and inappropriate framework for understanding justice.

Very often, such questions come from “Western” reporters socialized in predominantly Christian countries. The emphasis on forgiveness is often rooted in cultural or Christian traditions that are not universally shared. Expecting survivors - especially Muslims who survived a genocide by Christians - to adopt forgiveness as a moral obligation is paternalistic and dismissive of the gravity of their trauma. Likewise, “reconciliation” implies a somewhat balanced conflict between two sides, not a genocidal aggression of one over the other. There is no need for “both sides” to reconcile, there is a need for the perpetrator side to admit, regret, remember and draw consequences for the crimes committed in their name. Whether or not the survivors have forgiven those who never even asked for forgiveness is their own personal issue. And if they have not, that is completely justified.

Their choice deserves respect, not scrutiny.

Correcting Mistakes Quickly and Transparently

This should go without saying, but it’s worth repeating: if you make a mistake, correct it. Even with the support of these guidelines - mistakes can happen. It’s a complex issue and we understand. But if mistakes are pointed out to you, please be fast and thorough in correcting them. The way to do this is:

- Correct the mistake in the original piece - please do this fast, so the false information does not spread more.
- Apologize to genocide survivors and the Bosniak community for any retraumatization or hurt you caused when they had to read/hear false information about their biggest trauma.
- Thank the people who pointed out your mistake - it’s not their job to fact-check, but

they did. Make sure they know you are not angry, but appreciative.

- If at all possible, publish an additional piece about the mistake and the correction, to make sure you reach everyone who read the original piece with the correct information.

Important: Make sure to understand the difference between genocide deniers/minimizers trying to undermine your reporting, and Bosniaks or well-meaning people trying to correct and critique it to ensure high-quality work about such an important issue. If you are unsure about the distinction, you can reach out to experts on the last genocide against Bosniaks.

“Do You Recognize Srebrenica as Genocide?”

“Do you recognize Srebrenica as genocide?” or even worse “Was Srebrenica a genocide?” are questions asked in interviews, panel discussions, or even private conversations. They imply that everyone has the right to deny or not recognize genocides. That reduces scientific facts to a matter of opinion and grants random people the authority to interpret the greatest traumas of persecuted communities.

Genocide is not a gut feeling or an opinion. If genocide experts, relevant human rights organizations and the affected community largely agree that a particular case constitutes genocide, then that is the reality. Period. End of discussion. If individuals or organizations deny genocides, it does nothing to change reality - just like the existence of flat-earthers doesn't change the fact that the Earth is not flat.

This is why the question “Do you recognize the genocide?” is wrong. We don't ask, “Do you recognize the existence of London?” either.

The correct question should be: “Are you a genocide denier?”

No beating around the bush should be accepted as an answer. Unlike in many other situations, this requires a clear position: yes or no - no gray areas, no compromises.

Remember: very often, deniers deny denial. If someone answers that they are not a genocide denier, but there is a suspicion that this is merely an excuse, it should not be accepted at face value. Follow-up questions should address specific points to determine whether, in addition to denial, there is also an effort to downplay the genocide.

Please under no circumstances give genocide deniers a platform to explain their conspiracy theories. No matter how absurd or bizarre their claims seem, there are always people who will believe them. The malice and conspiracy-driven rhetoric of genocide deniers should never be underestimated.

Please keep records of the conversation for possible criminal prosecution, because denying the genocide is illegal and punishable in Germany, Switzerland and Bosnia, among other jurisdictions. Journalists, moderators, and event organizers should be aware that even giving a platform to genocide denial may carry legal consequences, especially if it is broadcast or distributed internationally.

Being Cognizant and Respectful of Trauma

When working with survivors of genocide, journalists must prioritize dignity over exclusivity. If a survivor has already shared their story publicly, it is neither ethical nor necessary to ask them to repeat it and relive their trauma simply for the sake of having a direct quote. These are very, very painful and personal memories. Some survivors want to tell their stories because they feel empowered when they do. But for others, it feels like ripping open a never healed wound. Therefore, unless a survivor insists on telling you themselves, you can quote or paraphrase the same person from other sources and let them tell you something else, something they have not told countless journalists before. Journalism is about truth, not ego.

Reporting on the Genocide Year-Round

Each year on the 11th of July, instead of mourning, many Bosniaks are forced to explain, justify, recount their trauma - because it is the only day the world even slightly listens. We understand that sometimes, especially during live coverage, it is impossible to avoid reporting during the anniversary. But please understand the emotional and mental toll this concentrated media attention can take - not only on survivors but also on those working at the Memorial Center. If at all possible, please do your interviews, research and filming before July

Also: The genocide in Srebrenica as well as the last genocide against Bosniaks are topics you can report on throughout the year.

If you really want to tie it to an official day, there are many options. A few examples:

- International days and national days against genocide
- Days against sexualized violence
- For refugees
- For press freedom or days related to journalism (you can report on the journalists killed while covering the siege and genocide – or on the coverage itself)

You can tie reporting to current topics and interview survivors on their perspectives of what is happening in similar situations of genocide, war, or the rise of fascism. You can also explore how the genocide keeps being a focal point in the ideologies of far-right terrorists, as well as ties between the global far-right and Serb or Croat nationalists.

You can also report on anniversaries such as:

- **The Reintegration of Grbavica** - Withdrawal of the last Serb troops from Sarajevo (March 19, 1996)
- **The Siege of Sarajevo** (April 5 1992-February 29 1996)
- **The Srebrenica Schoolyard Massacre** (April 12, 1993)
- **The Ahmići Massacre** (April 16, 1993)
- **The Stoning of Murat Badić and the destruction of the Ferhadija** (May 7 2001 and 1993, respectively)
- **The “White Armband Day”** (May 31, 1992)
- **The Living Pyres of Višegrad** (June 14 and 27 1992)
- **The Closure of Omarska Concentration Camp** (August 6-21 1992)
- **The Burning of Bosnia’s National and University Library** (August 25-26 1992)

As well as many other anniversaries - and then tie those stories back to Srebrenica.

And - how about this - just report on the genocide without needing a reason, because the genocide itself is reason enough.

The Genocide Is Not “the Past”

The last genocide against Bosniaks is not a matter of the past. Many of the perpetrators still walk around freely, often even holding positions of power in politics, police or the military. The far-right worldwide draws inspiration from it. The country’s infrastructure and economy are still reeling from the destruction. Bosniaks all over the world live with trauma as well as chronic pain and disabilities as a result of being wounded during the genocide. Children born of genocidal rape, only in their 30s, now struggle with their roles of being young parents themselves. Women and girls who survived rape camps still live with mental and physical pain. Elderly women live lonely and in poverty after their children and husbands were killed. Thousands of people are still missing. Exhumations continue and new mass graves are found. The genocide shapes political, cultural and economic life in Bosnia. Genocide denial and triumphalism are still prevalent, even in the world’s parliaments, academia and media. It’s an everyday topic in conversations, never forgotten, never gone. And there are many, many more examples. In short: There is always a reason to report on the genocide and its current aftershocks.

Dealing With Genocide Deniers

Genocide denial is not a legitimate opinion, nor is it a form of political commentary. It is the tenth stage of genocide, a part of genocide itself. Giving a platform to genocide denial - under the guise of “balance” or to provoke “controversy” - only shows that the media in question aren’t capable of getting views and clicks with quality journalism instead of cheap shock tactics.

There is no journalistic value in legitimizing denial. Responsible reporting should draw from the many credible, diverse, and informed voices within Bosnia and the Bosniak diaspora.

Genocide denial is not only ethically indefensible - it is also a criminal offense in several jurisdictions. Denying or relativizing the genocide against Bosniaks is punishable under law in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Germany, and Switzerland, among others. These laws may apply to content published or accessible in those countries, regardless of where the author or platform is based.

Genocide deniers will always exist. But they must be held accountable and forced to the fringes of society.

How to Recognize and Avoid Subtle Genocide Denial/Relativization

A common misunderstanding is that genocide denial means denying that any atrocity occurred at all. In fact, denial takes multiple forms, many of which are more subtle but equally damaging.

These include:

- Downplaying victim numbers
- Minimizing or omitting key aspects of the crime, such as systematic rape, forced displacement, or the deliberate targeting of civilians
- Most pervasively, denying the genocidal intent behind the crimes - reducing them to a “massacre,” “tragedy,” or “war crime”

This last form is particularly widespread in the case of Srebrenica. Many genocide deniers admit that thousands of Bosniaks were killed, but refuse to recognize this as genocide. This tactic allows denial to masquerade as nuance or neutrality.

Even when victim numbers and other facts are acknowledged, refusing to name genocide as such is still a form of denial. This needs to be understood and called out because many genocide deniers hide behind saying “it was a tragedy” and pretending to be on the right side of history.


Avoiding Linguistic Distancing

When someone avoids using the term genocide and only does so when quoting others (whether a court ruling, an expert, or a government), they downgrade genocide from a fact to merely an opinion. This form of linguistic distancing can imply doubt where there should be none.

Phrasing such as “considered genocide”, “labeled as genocide”, or “seen by some as genocide” can give the impression that the writer or speaker does not personally recognize the genocide, is distancing themselves from it, and is shifting the “blame” for this classification onto the courts instead.

The genocide should simply be named as what it is, without relying on external quotes or paraphrasing - because it is simply reality and does not need to be proven over and over again to every reader. If historical genocide rulings are to be mentioned, the correct phrasing is that the ICTY and ICJ confirmed that it is genocide, based on extensive and infamously strict legal standards and evidence. They confirmed, not “classified,” “categorized,” or “consider Srebrenica a genocide.” No, it is a fact - and facts are confirmed, not “considered”, “seen as” or similar.

There’s no need to present facts as tentative or controversial. Journalists and communicators have a responsibility to use direct, unambiguous language. Genocide should be named for what it is - not paraphrased, quoted, or attributed solely to others. The facts speak for themselves and do not require continuous proof.

 **Use:** The last genocide against Bosniaks 1992-1996

Honoring Survivors’ Work

Much of what is known today about the international community’s failures during the Bosnian genocide has come from the investigations and tireless work of survivors themselves. The documentation of the genocide - including genocidal rapes - was led by those directly affected.

If your work draws on the testimony, research, or experience of genocide survivors or local experts, please credit them in your work. Good journalism and research should show respect for those who’ve carried the weight of proving, remembering and speaking out.

4. About the author

This work was authored by Melina Borčak at the request of the Srebrenica Memorial Center, which unequivocally supports its content and purpose.

Melina Borčak is a journalist and documentary filmmaker who has worked with leading international media outlets including CNN, arte, and Der Spiegel. She is the bestselling author of “Mekka hier, Mekka da”, which analyzes how language and media (re)produce anti-Muslim racism.

In addition to Borčaks more than 15 years of professional experience in traditional media, she works directly for her community of over 100.000 followers across multiple social media platforms.