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THREE DECADES AFTER SREBRENICA: HISTORICAL REVISIONISM, TRIUMPHALISM, AND DENIAL OF GENOCIDE

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Abstract. Three decades after the 1995 Srebrenica genocide, the struggle over historical truth remains a defining feature of post-conflict Bosnia and the broader Balkans. This paper examines the persistent dynamics of historical revisionism, triumphalism, and genocide denial that have emerged in political discourse, public memory, and institutional narratives since the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia and the International Court of Justice legally recognized the genocide. Drawing on political speeches, media representations, and commemorative practices, it analyzes how competing national projects instrumentalize the memory of Srebrenica – whether through the glorification of convicted war criminals, the erasure of victimhood, or the framing of genocide as a contested interpretation rather than an established fact. By situating Srebrenica within global patterns of genocide denial and memorial politics, the study highlights the urgent need to defend evidence-based historical narratives against politically motivated manipulation and to reinforce the moral and legal imperatives of genocide recognition.

Keywords: Srebrenica, Bosnia, Yugoslavia, Serbia, genocide denial, genocide triumphalism

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1. Introduction

The war in Bosnia (1992–1995) is characterized by mass ethnic cleansing, carried out to create ethnically homogeneous territories, primarily Serbian ones. The Bosniak Muslim population from eastern Bosnia found refuge in the town

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of Srebrenica, which was declared a "safe zone" by the United Nations in 1993. However, this did not prevent Serbian forces from attacking and capturing the town in July 1995. The Bosniak population massively headed towards the nearby place of Potočari, where the barracks of the Dutch UNPROFOR soldiers were located. Although some of the refugees were given shelter, the Dutch soldiers received orders not to intervene. Soon, members of the Army of Republika Srpska (VRS) arrived in Potočari (Pollack 2003a: 793–794, 2003b: 188).

In the following days, men were separated from women and taken to an unknown direction. Women were placed on buses that took them to territory under Bosniak control. In the following days, there was no trace or word of the men who had been taken, and suspicions grew that they had been killed. Serbian soldiers under the command of General Ratko Mladić took the captured men to several locations in eastern Bosnia and Herzegovina, where they were executed. Over the course of one week, more than 8,000 men and boys were killed (Toom 2020: 358).

The bodies of those killed were buried in several mass graves. Once suspicions arose that this was an act of genocide, the VRS launched an operation to conceal this crime. With the help of heavy machinery and local public utility companies, these graves were dug up and the remains were moved to secondary and tertiary graves. This destruction of the remains later led to problems with identification, as the heavy machinery destroyed the bodies and scattered their parts to different locations across the country (Kontsevaia 2013: 17).

After the end of the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) began investigating this case and filing indictments, primarily against Radovan Karadžić and Ratko Mladić. After decades of investigation and trials, more than ten individuals were convicted of genocide (UNIRMCT s.a.).

However, although the court rulings of the ICTY and the verdict of the International Court of Justice (ICJ) have unequivocally established that genocide occurred in Srebrenica, denial of this fact is a pervasive narrative in Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Montenegro.

The problem with this narrative is greater because it comes from official bodies in Serbia and the Bosnian entity of Republika Srpska, as well as from some officials in Montenegro. Such organized denial of the Srebrenica genocide represents an open undermining of peace in the Balkans and creates permanent tension and hatred, primarily between Serbs and Bosniaks.

2. Denial – "the final stage of genocide"

Denial is something that follows each genocide once it is over. Perpetrators of genocide try to hide their tracks and pretend that it never happened or manipulate and distort facts to remove the mark of "perpetrator" from themselves. Additionally, denial serves to further politically manipulate a particular community whose members were the perpetrators to strengthen the hate towards other groups considered hostile

by the former. This section will present the most important findings and theories related to genocide denial.

Stanton (1996) created the "Ten stages of genocide" model. He developed this model during the previous decades, and it became widely used by numerous organizations and governments. "Denial" is named the tenth and final stage of genocide. According to Stanton, the perpetrators of genocide initially attempt to hide their tracks. Mass graves are dug through, bodies burned, and all evidence and witness accounts are destroyed. There are many examples of this. When the Nazis realized defeat was imminent, they dug through mass graves and burned the bodies of those killed in concentration camps. After the genocide in Srebrenica, bodies were buried in mass graves. When speculations of genocide arose, the perpetrators began digging primary graves out and relocating the victims' body parts to secondary or even tertiary mass graves to cover their tracks.

Stanton (2008) also claims that denial "is actually a continuation of the genocide, because it is a continuing attempt to destroy the victim group psychologically and culturally, to deny its members even the memory of the murders of their relatives." That is, the goal of genocide denial is to perpetuate the genocide in some form. Denial represents a big blow to the survivors and the victims' families. Massive psychological and emotional pressure is put on said persons through denial. Therefore, we cannot say that genocide is over so long as its denial exists, especially if it comes from official addresses. Officials' roles are major, considering they have the means of sanctioning or inciting denial. Likewise, they must ensure that the judicially confirmed truth reaches the people, first and foremost through official education, so that the victims would never be forgotten and the genocide never repeated.

Charny (1999: 159) states that the perpetrators desire to absolve themselves through denial. Such activity represents an attack on the collective identity of the group against which the genocide was committed, preventing it from healing. Charny agrees with the constatation that genocide denial is the final phase of genocide, which can last long after the killings stop. In cases of state-sponsored genocide denial, there are possibilities for future genocidal killings.

In his further work, Charny attempts to present different forms of deniers. In "A two-tier theory of psychological motivations of denial" (Charny 2000: 19), he tries to puzzle out the psychological motivation of deniers. In the first continuum, Charny goes "from innocent" denial to "malevolent denial," where he focuses on whether or not deniers know of the event they are denying. In the second continuum, he goes from "innocent disavowals" to "celebration of violence" based on whether or not the denier participates in celebrating previous violence and invoking the new.

With each genocide, there are those deniers who are entirely aware of the truth and the facts relating to a particular event. Due to their malice, they still opt for lying, distortion, denial, and revisionism. On the other hand, many people deny genocide simply because they do not know enough. One part of these deniers accepts incorrect interpretations of events because they are in line with their values and other opinions. However, some never want to inform themselves. Charny puts these in the "innocent denier" category (2000: 20).

In the second continuum, we noted that some celebrate violence and invoke its repetition, while others deny past genocides but do not support anything similar happening again. Genocide celebrators are usually groups of fanatics who call for further violence. In Srebrenica's case, we can include various Serbian sports fan groups known for public invocation of genocide. Conversely, the "innocent disavowals of violence" category includes deniers and revisionists who wish to fake and falsify facts about a previous genocide but do not call for its repetition. This group justifies its actions with a so-called yearning to reach historical truths and reconciliation (Charny 2000: 25–26). In the former Yugoslavia, we see these attempts in the drastic downplaying of the number of Srebrenica victims, the Jasenovac concentration camp, or through equalizing the Chetniks with the People's Liberation Movement (the Partisans).

Smith et al. (1995: 13) also claim that genocide denial in academic circles is underestimated and, therefore, very dangerous. The authors argue that "deliberate denial is a form of aggression that ought to be regarded as a contribution to genocidal violence in its own right."

Oranlı (2018: 45–50) points out the importance of the political background of genocides. He believes that genocide denial is an "ideologically supported political lie." Such a lie is, above all, systemic and encapsulates a broad spectrum of factors. Simply, genocide denial becomes a political goal so that the political elites can maintain their ideology. Lies create an entirely new "truth" and perception of events. This is usually achieved through educational programs so that the citizens would be served the ideologically compatible "truth," i.e., fake historical facts, to maintain and heighten the hate toward one group. This activity leads to the rise of historical revisionism.

Denial at a systemic level is much more dangerous than denial at an individual level. Altanian (2021: 136–138) views "genocide denialism" as a "larger, orchestrated, ideological, political or cultural pattern of denial." Through such activity, genocide against a particular group is sought to be justified, and the group itself is presented as a threat, making genocide a necessity. In some cases of genocide denialism, the term "genocide" is strictly avoided. For example, some Serbian officials admit that a "great crime" had happened in Srebrenica but deny the existence of genocide. The goal of this behavior is to create a different (or incorrect) perception of those events. Such a distortion of facts is dangerous and could negatively impact the "open-minded" part of the population and make it difficult for them to reach the proper conclusions.

"Material self-interest" is a primary reason for genocide denial, says Jones (2013: 791). In his opinion, denial maintains the status quo and thus allows for political and financial gain. We find this exact situation in today's Serbia, where the political elites maintain nationalist rhetoric to preserve their position of power. According to Jones, this is characteristic of societies that would wish to preserve their preferred (though fake) image of the state and of themselves, thus avoiding the reality that contradicts their understanding.

Jones (2013: 791–793) further lists some of the "common discourses of genocide denial," such as "hardly anybody died," "it was self-defense," "it was not intentional," and "we are the real victims." All of these discourses we find in Srebrenica's case, and we will speak more about them in the later sections. We should especially note that genocide deniers usually try to dispute the existence of genocidal intent. Since the intent to destroy a particular group partially or entirely is what differentiates genocides from crimes against humanity, it is no surprise that the deniers would first seek to strike at the term itself. Naturally, international courts carefully draw conclusions related to genocidal intent as it is such a delicate matter.

The criminalization of genocide denial is a heavily debated subject. While most believe that punishing those who deny genocides is more than necessary, there are opinions that doing so would infringe on the "freedom of speech." Unfortunately, countries have not reached a consensus on the subject. Most member countries of the European Union have criminalized genocide denial. On the other hand, numerous states defend freedom of speech and refuse "the role of government as the arbiter of historical fact" (Smith 2010: 131).

3. Triumphalism – more than denial?

We saw above that Charny wrote of those who celebrate genocides and call for new killings. This behavior goes far beyond the scope of the mere denial of genocide and should therefore be carefully analyzed. Celebrating genocides and striving to repeat them is a crime in and of itself. Unfortunately, such behavior is a grim reality in the states of the former Yugoslavia.

Halilovich (2017: 7) says that "in this stage, perpetrators, their sponsors, and the politics behind genocide do not deny the killings anymore but glorify them." He further states (2021: 123–124) that genocide triumphalism manifests itself through ceremonial celebrations of the genocide's date; celebrations of war criminals and their glorification as heroes; singing of songs celebrating the killing and the genocide; and the belittling and discrimination of the victims, their families, and those returning to the former killing fields. He finally concludes that:

> This culture of genocide triumphalism goes beyond genocidal denial, in genocide studies also known as the last stage of genocide. Namely, in Serbia and the Serb-controlled part of Bosnia (RS), the Srebrenica genocide is not merely denied anymore, but it is celebrated and its perpetrators glorified, while the Bosniak survivors are exposed to humiliating and degrading treatment, if they choose to return to their pre-war places now in RS (122).

Karčić (2022: 99–109) views genocide triumphalism as "instrumentalized hatred." Such triumphalism and celebration of war criminals reflect in declaring war criminals heroes and making them unique "reality show celebrities." Giving media platforms to war criminals leads to their glorification and provides them with

means to continue their genocidal policies since they would have access to a broad audience. Karčić also sees a significant issue in the emergence of nationalist songs that mobilize and maintain the celebratory narrative. In addition, triumphalism is reflected in "erasing history," for example, through memorials erected at genocide sites that serve to distort the facts, deny the genocide, and present the perpetrators as the "real victims."

Additionally, institutionalized triumphalism can serve as a form of "strategic interest" (Džananović 2022: 121). This is especially the case in societies governed by a strong nationalist narrative and where the governing elites exploit it to maintain power.

Charny (2011: 15) finally asks the question of whether those who celebrate genocides and call for new killings will ever be sanctioned. Limits on speech must exist, especially for speech that calls for the repetition of violence that has already taken thousands of lives. This behavior and nurturing of the hateful narrative, primarily when sponsored by the state, can cause numerous issues. It can prevent reconciliation and potentially even cause new bloodshed.

4. Historical revisionism

Historical revisionism "means the effort to, either for individual or collective ideological and political gain, revise scientific interpretations of particular historical events or periods to remove their traumatic impact on the collective consciousness and identity" (Bandžović 2020: 138). Revising historical facts is an attempt to "escape" the reality and collective responsibility that may endanger national identity.

Serbian historian Latinka Perović (2012: 32) says that the goal of historical revisionism is to create "the basis for a new national identity." Each nationalist ideology, including Serbian, carries the effects of its actions throughout history. "The meaning of historical revisionism is to interpret those effects in such a way as to ensure the duration of the ideology itself." A government led by nationalist ideology attempts to keep itself in power and convince the citizens of its infallibility and correctness. Thus, it uses the distortion and falsification of generally accepted facts and passes them on to the masses it wishes to influence.

Naturally, anyone who does not think in line with such a government and its ideology is the ultimate enemy. That imaginary enemy, in the opinion of nationalists, endangers their "national identity." The fight against this "enemy" is the core of revisionism. Cipek (2019: 5) states that "in the core of radical right-wing ideology lies, namely, the myth of a homogeneous nation." That homogeneous nation would have no internal enemies. It would therefore be an environment where the nationalist ideology could implement its ideas and dictate its own version of the past and the facts. He further states that revisionists are not interested in history but only use it for daily political purposes (7).

Škorić and Bešlin (2017: 635) express the idea that "negationists do not seek proofs which converge in some conclusion, but rather seek evidence which fits

into their ideology." Because of this, revisionists consider only those facts suited to their ideology. There is simply no room for doubt with ideologically accepted facts. Such a selective approach to facts is one of the primary characteristics of historical revisionism. Škorić and Bešlin (2017) additionally state that the revisionists' goal is not to offer new findings but to undermine the existing ones that are not ideologically suitable to them. We find the root of this in what we said earlier about viewing dissenters as enemies that pose a constant threat of destroying "our community." Because of that, it is necessary to dispute any research from the enemy side since danger lies in ideologically incompatible facts.

Revisionists wish to influence their select audience "therapeutically," i.e., to manipulate select communities to mitigate possible deficiencies psychologically. This could be a fictional reduction of guilt by denying crimes committed, using myths to awaken national consciousness and pride, or inventing theories of a global conspiracy against "our folk" (Tucker 2008: 5). This kind of action exists in today's Serbia, where a selective approach to facts serves to dodge the collective shame of the 1990s. In addition, a romantic interpretation of history has long since become part of everyday life, and stories of a "heroic and glorious past" push the narrative of superiority over other peoples labeled as "enemies." Inevitable is also the "global conspiracy" narrative invented to "impose shame on Serbia," "destroy Serbdom and Orthodoxy," and so on.

Furthermore, historical revisionism could serve as an initiator of new conflicts so that "glory could be reclaimed" and a "great and homogeneous state" could once again be formed. Hall and Malešević (2013: 75) define this as "the revisionist state: a state dissatisfied with the current international order and willing to incur high costs by using force to change the territorial status quo or the regime of other states." Something similar happened in the 1930s when the Nazis used the great dissatisfaction of the German people. In such moments, they succeeded in imposing the narrative of Germany's past glory that should be restored. In addition, they denied Germany's responsibility for the destruction in World War I and blamed the "global conspiracy" and the Jews for the country's condition at the time.

5. Historical revisionism, triumphalism, and denial of the Srebrenica genocide

Historical revisionism is probably the worst form of genocide denial. We speak of this when we look at the education of new generations. By purposefully falsifying and distorting the facts, the revisionists attempt to fabricate a new reality and an entirely new world – a reality without collective responsibility, in which the perpetrator's responsibility is transferred to the victim.

History books should, as a rule, present accepted facts in accordance with modern scientific standards. Simply put, history textbooks from which children learn at school should be truthful. They should use scientifically verified facts and not pseudohistorical and revisionist narratives. However, is that the case?

Historical revisionism has long since become part of everyday life in the Balkans. Naturally, this process has not circumvented history textbooks, and new generations are prone to be manipulated with facts compatible with the political elites.

The most striking revisionist narrative that formed at the start of the 1990s and later is one of the two alleged antifascist movements during World War II – the Partisans and the Chetniks. This narrative served the Serbian nationalist elites in power to abolish the Chetniks' cooperation with the Nazis. Their goal was to present the Chetniks as fighters against Nazism and Fascism and equalize them with the People's Liberation Movement of Yugoslavia, i.e., Tito's Partisans (Cipek 2019: 15–17).

Everything the Serb nationalists had wanted to achieve in the 1990s was realized with Milošević's fall and the assumption of power of the democratic opposition. Nationalism did not disappear with Milošević and others indicted by the ICTY in The Hague.

In 2004, the People's Assembly of the Republic of Serbia enacted the "Law on amendments to the Law on the rights of fighters, disabled veterans, and their family members." This law granted the Chetnik fighters the same rights as the fighters of the People's Liberation Movement of Yugoslavia, i.e., the Partisans (Službeni glasnik Republike Srbije 2004).

In 2011, the People's Assembly of the Republic of Serbia enacted the "Law on rehabilitation." This law made it possible to be rehabilitated for crimes committed during World War II (Službeni glasnik Republike Srbije 2011).

Four years later, Chetnik leader Dragoljub Draža Mihailović was rehabilitated by the High Court in Belgrade (Al Jazeera 2015). The ruling raised the question of the victims: is it moral to rehabilitate someone responsible for the deaths of tens of thousands of non-Serbs in World War II?

The desire to fabricate history has sometimes led to total historical absurdities. Namely, on May 9, the "Day of Victory" is celebrated in Belgrade to commemorate the victory against Nazism in Europe. Of course, nothing would be strange here if, at one point, pictures of Dragoljub Draža Mihailović were not shown on a screen right next to those of Tito. The speakers at that commemoration were Serbia's president, Aleksandar Vučić, and the president of Republika Srpska, Milorad Dodik (Vurušić 2021).

This paved the way for future revisionism and fabrication of World War II and postwar history. At the same time, it was necessary to update textbooks to align with the prevailing ideological and political understandings of the 1990s.

In 2002, the new history textbooks were published in Serbia. The only change was related to World War II in Yugoslavia, i.e., the relations between the Chetniks and the Partisans. These books (and all the following editions) hone the narrative that equalizes these two movements and even presents the Chetnik movement as the right one. This is justified by claims that the Chetniks were the only movement that cared about the Serbian national interests. Conversely, the authors blame Yugoslavia's Partisans and the Community Party for "dividing the Serbian ethnic space" (Stojanović 2008: 157–164).

Such an interpretation not only bends and falsely presents the facts but also takes away the Montenegrins' and Bosniaks' right to their own language and their ethnic and national identity. In the Serbian language textbook for the eighth grade of elementary school, approved by the Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development of Serbia, it is stated that "according to the stance of the Committee for the Standardization of the Serbian Language, the Croats, Bosniaks, and some Montenegrins call this language [Serbian] as Croatian, Bosnian/Bosniak, and Montenegrin" (Marinković 2020: 7).

As for the interpretation of the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina, it also fell under political and ideological influence. This is especially the case in Bosnia and Herzegovina, where students are taught from textbooks according to their ethnicity. Thus, Bosniak children in Srebrenica, part of Republika Srpska, learn history according to the plan and program of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina. On the other hand, their classmates learn it from textbooks issued by the Republika Srpska entity. The classes are divided according to ethnicity, so when Bosniak children have a history class, the Serbs have geography and vice versa. Here we see a clear presence of ethnic segregation created for the political and ideological gain of those in power (Erduan 2020).

Beyond clear segregation, children do not learn the same facts. In the textbook used by elementary school children of Serbian ethnicity, the Srebrenica genocide is nowhere to be found. It is only stated that "the Army of Republika Srpska captured Srebrenica and Žepa." Additionally, this textbook shows the Serbs as the sole victims of ethnic cleansing (Obrenović 2020).

We can see a similar interpretation of events in the history textbook for the third and fourth years of high school. This textbook is also used by the Bosniak children of Srebrenica, i.e., the family members of those who died in the genocide. The textbook maintains that the desire of the Bosniaks and Croats in 1991 was to discriminate against Serbs and create a state that was not a state of the Serbian people. There is no mention of the siege of Sarajevo or of the verdicts related to the crimes against civilians during the siege. Also, there is no mention of the crimes committed in Srebrenica. Nearly identically to the elementary school textbook, it states that "the VRS captured the Bosniak enclaves of Srebrenica and Žepa in July." Radovan Karadžić is described as a "psychiatrist, poet, and politician," and Ratko Mladić as a "Serb general and commander" (Vasić 2020: 238–241).

In the eighth-grade elementary school textbook used by students in Serbia, it is stated that "the massacre in Srebrenica is a war crime and a crime against humanity committed by the VRS with the help of paramilitary formations against soldiers and civilians of Bosniak ethnicity. The total number of victims is disputed. According to some, over 8,000 people were killed, and others consider this number an exaggeration" (Obrenović 2020).

The history textbooks used in Serbia do not analyze the Serbian side's accountability in the crimes committed against non-Serbs in Bosnia and Herzegovina and other parts of the former Yugoslavia. Conversely, Serbs are presented as the sole victims of the war. This is additionally reinforced by photographs found in the textbooks, which explicitly present the suffering of Serbs (Đureinović and Jovanović 2020: 25).

This interpretation of events questions the verdicts related to the Srebrenica genocide. The ICTY unequivocally concluded in its verdicts that genocide against Bosniaks had been committed and sentenced the most prominent political and military Bosnian Serb leaders for it. Moreover, the number of victims killed in the genocide has been established, both by the ICTY and by other institutions, leaving no room to dispute or doubt these findings. Through such interpretations, there is a desire to instill doubt into the students' minds and make them question the verdicts of international courts, thus leading them to form opinions of a conspiracy to shame the Serbian people.

Since signing a Memorandum in 2010 between the Ministry of Education and Culture of Republika Srpska and the Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development of Serbia, work has been done to harmonize the history education programs (Veselinović and Zorić 2019). This process seeks to establish the same views on events in Serbia and Republika Srpska. Naturally, all of this has a political agenda. In his speech to the People's Assembly of the Republic of Serbia in February 2021, the minister of the interior, Aleksandar Vulin, said that the state of Serbia must write the "history books" (Bogdanović 2021). What is worrying is that this statement was uttered by a high government official, even though Vulin is recognized as someone who harbors nationalist sentiments. Since the statement represents an important ministry, it is safe to assume that Vulin's stance on who should write the history textbooks is the stance of the entire government. Such a narrative could be interpreted as a desire of Serbia to create a history textbook based on its national interests and not on facts. Of course, the result of that historical revisionism and wrongful interpretation of facts would be the rise of nationalism and animosity toward other ethnic groups in Serbia and Republika Srpska.

Interpreting false facts to produce animosity toward other ethnic groups through history textbooks is not only aimed against Bosniaks, Croats, and Albanians. The fourth-year high school history textbook published in Serbia in 2021 states that after the restoration of Montenegrin independence in 2006, the Serbs in Montenegro found themselves in "a challenging situation." It goes on to say that Serbs were treated unequally, fired from their jobs, that the government in Montenegro sought to reduce their numbers, that the Serbian Orthodox Church was persecuted, and that Montenegrin history textbooks insulted Serbs. None of this has any basis in reality but is a product of propaganda. The Montenegrin Ministry of Foreign Affairs protested and demanded that Serbia remove these statements (Pobjeda 2022).

The most common form of historical revisionism in the Srebrenica case is reducing the number of victims. By doing so, the revisionists want to present fewer victims as proof that no genocide has happened. Additionally, they try to trivialize the victims' deaths by claiming that the numbers are exaggerated and that those who are counted among the victims actually died elsewhere (Green 2020: 9).

Of course, historical revisionism in Bosnia and Herzegovina primarily comes from the political leadership of the Bosnian Serbs. The most significant contributor to and promoter of historical revisionism is the president of Republika Srpska, Milorad Dodik. Apart from his claim that no genocide happened in Srebrenica, which he

repeated several times, he stated many other similar things. In June 2015, he said that Srebrenica is "the biggest scam of the 20th century" (Radio Slobodna Evropa 2015). In April 2015, shortly before the "Srebenica, reality and manipulations" conference, Dodik said that "the Bosniaks are trying to build a myth of Srebrenica. That is a false myth; that myth does not exist" (Radio Slobodna Evropa 2019a). The product of that very conference is an 800-page collection of papers that represents an attempt to rewrite history by presenting and publishing false facts and manipulations. Since the benefactors of this conference were institutions of Republika Srpska, and the collection can be found on the website of the Republika Srpska's Representative Office in Serbia, we can safely conclude that revisionism is accepted, promoted, and supported by the Bosnian Serb leadership (Predstavništvo Republike Srpske u Srbiji 2023). Dodik repeated what he had said about the "myth" right before the genocide's anniversary in July 2019 and pointed out that the "Bosniak national identity is built on the myth of Srebrenica" (Radio Slobodna Evropa 2019b).

The publication produced by this conference is certainly not the only revisionist book published in recent times. A considerable number of books revising events of the 1990s are published each year. Many of those are authored by convicted war criminals. One of them is a three-volume work by Vojislav Šešelj titled "There was no Genocide in Srebrenica," published in 2019 and presented at the International Book Fair in Belgrade (KTV 2019). For years now, this fair has been the host for numerous revisionist books, and the owner of the fair is the City of Belgrade (Ćirić n.d.).

The individuals and institutions from Republika Srpska and Serbia are not the only ones responsible for revisionist narratives. Numerous international organizations and individuals often play the revisionist role. Many individuals contribute to revisionist policy through their publications or statements. Among them are Noam Chomsky, Edward Herman, David Peterson, John Pilgera, Michael Parentia, Jared Israela, and others. The fact that one of the most prominent genocide deniers, Peter Handke, was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature in 2019, speaks of just how open the denial of the Srebrenica genocide is (Green 2020: 30, 40–41).

In July 2015, an attempt was made at the UN Security Council (UNSC) to adopt a resolution that would characterize the events in Srebrenica as genocide. Of the fifteen UNSC member-states, only ten voted in favor of the resolution, while Russia was against it, and China, Venezuela, Angola, and Nigeria abstained. The resolution did not pass due to Russia's veto. Of course, this is just an extension of Russia's support for Serbia's policy and Russia's stance on Srebrenica (United Nations 2015).

It is logical to conclude that honing and encouraging revisionist policies suits only those who see the harm in the truth and facts. By looking at historical events and similar processes that have happened in the past, we can see that revisionism only serves those who wish to continue with nationalist policies. Unfortunately, experience shows that nationalist policies are the easiest way to govern in Serbia.

Malešević says that nationalism in Serbia today is "fully grounded and deeply entrenched in the institutions and the everyday life of [their] citizens." The goal of constantly exposing students in Serbia to the nationalist interpretation of history is to

turn them into nationally conscious people as a whole before they come of age, i.e., become eligible to vote (Malešević 2019: 227–228).

By creating a new generation of nationalists, a new army of voters is secured that will support such policies. Of course, the goal of politicizing history is also the future development of ethnic conflicts (Ognjenović and Jozelić 2020: 10). This is crucial for the Serbian nationalist elites, primarily because of Kosovo, Republika Srpska's desire to secede, and the ever-frequent mentions of "uniting" all Serbs into a single Serbian state.

Political elites imposed historical revisionism to form new nationalistic generations – and they succeeded. Fostering policies of historical revisionism has had an effect since the 2000s. In the case of the Srebrenica genocide, this is reflected in the increasing incidence of denial and triumphalism. Unfortunately, we can note that denialism and triumphalism have massively spread among the youth. The new nationalist group's assumption of power in Serbia has paved the way for these incidents, as they are backed by the state. This is the proof of a connection between the nationalistic elites, corrupted school programs, and their byproduct – youth drunk with nationalism and people denying and celebrating the Srebrenica genocide and the murder of over 8,000 Bosniaks.

In many cases, the denial of the Srebrenica genocide crosses all standards of denialism. It grows into a celebration of death and crimes committed against Bosniaks in Srebrenica – it grows into triumphalism.

Hariz Halilovich, a professor of global studies at RMIT University in Melbourne (Australia), invented this term (Karčić 2021: 61). In his opinion, triumphalism transcends the scope of denialism, and thus in many cases in Serbia and Republika Srpska, genocide is not denied but celebrated (Halilovich 2021: 122).

The most striking way of celebrating the ethnic cleansing of non-Serbs in Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Srebrenica genocide is commemorating the Day of Republika Srpska on January 9 each year. On that day in 1992, the Assembly of the Serbian People in Bosnia and Herzegovina declared that the Serbian People's Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina, which would later be renamed as Republika Srpska, would become one of the two entities comprising the modern Bosnia and Herzegovina. That same assembly decided to celebrate January 9 as the Day of the Republic. Naturally, this decision is a form of secessionism made to create an ethnically pure Greater Serbia. The formation of a great Serbian state never came to fruition, but ethnic homogenization in the area certainly did. With ethnic cleansing and genocide, most non-Serbs that inhabited those parts of Bosnia and Herzegovina were either exiled or killed.

The Constitutional Court of the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina declared the formation of the so-called Serbian People's Republic unconstitutional on February 28, 1992, along with all the laws determining its holidays. However, after the Dayton Accords, this date continues to be commemorated in the Republika Srpska entity, and in 2007 it became part of the "Law on the Republika Srpska holidays," adopted by the People's Assembly of Republika Srpska. The Constitutional Court of Bosnia and Herzegovina declared the Day of Republika Srpska unconstitutional.

This did not daunt the Bosnian Serbs, who continue commemorating the date. In July 2016, the Assembly of Republika Srpska decided to call a referendum on the question. The Constitutional Court blocked this decision.

Nevertheless, the referendum was held on September 25, 2016. Over 99% of voters voted to continue commemorating January 9 as the Day of Republika Srpska. A month later, the Assembly of Republika Srpska passed a law declaring January 9 as the Day of Republika Srpska. The Constitutional Court then once again declared this holiday unconstitutional, but the Day of Republika Srpska continues to be commemorated each year (Obradović and Čilić 2020).

This day is generally commemorated with a parade of the armed police forces of Republika Srpska. Apart from the representatives of Republika Srpska, Serbian politicians also participate in the event. Serbia's president, Aleksandar Vučić, and the high government official, Aleksandar Vulin, are frequent guests of this gathering. Another frequent guest is Russia's ambassador to Bosnia and Herzegovina. The patriarch of the Serbian Orthodox Church holds a liturgy in Banjaluka each January 9, since that day is also the Feast Day of Republika Srpska (Ibrahimović and Arnautović 2023, Veselinović and Katić 2022).

The "Day of Srebrenica's liberation" is also often celebrated. Serbian extremist organizations, above all the Eastern Alternative from Bratunac, celebrate July 11 – the day when the VRS led by Ratko Mladić entered Srebrenica. Since family members of those killed in the genocide are often present in Srebrenica around that time, they are met with posters of Ratko Mladić calling them to a celebration of the "Day of Srebrenica's liberation" (Dnevni avaz 2020).

Congratulations on "Srebrenica's liberation" also come from high officials in Serbia. Thus, in 2019, a member of parliament of the governing Serbian Progressive Party (SNS) wrote on Twitter, marking the "Day of Srebrenica's liberation" and thanking Ratko Mladić for the "brilliantly executed Krivaja military operation" (Mitrović 2019).

The Eastern Alternative and other organizations have also pasted posters of Ratko Mladić in recent years, congratulating him on his birthday, calling him a hero, and reminding everyone that "no genocide happened in Srebrenica." In their statements for the media, these organizations call Mladić a "great Serb" and call for the "secession of RS and merging with mother Serbia" (Aktuelno 2020, Radio Slobodna Evropa 2020a, B92 2021).

Celebrating war criminals, primarily Radovan Karadžić and Ratko Mladić, is frequent. When Karadžić was arrested in 2008, the Serbian Radical Party (SRS) organized mass protests where protestors clashed with police and demolished the town. The acting president of Serbia, Aleksandar Vučić, as an official of the SRS, participated in these protests (RTS 2008). It is interesting to note that on July 20, 1995, while mass executions were ongoing in and around Srebrenica, Vučić gave a speech in the People's Assembly of Serbia and warned the international community that for each dead Serb, they would kill a hundred Muslims (Diković 2022).

The banners of support for Karadžić and Mladić are frequent at football, basketball, and handball matches in Serbia and Republika Srpska. The Serbian clubs

Partizan and Red Star Belgrade stand out the most in this regard. Incidents are most frequent in matches against clubs with a Bosniak ethnic majority. On one occasion, in a match between Partizan and Novi Pazar, the former's supporters held out the banners with images of Ratko Mladić and chanted "Knife, string, Srebrenica" (Al Jazeera 2021). This chant, celebrating the murders in Srebrenica, is often used by extremist sports fans and other extremist groups. When the football club Partizan played in The Hague (Netherlands) in 2019, the city of ICTY, Partizan's supporters went in front of the prison and chanted Serbian songs. Mladić was then on trial at The Hague and sent the sports fans his thanks and greetings through his son (Mondo 2019). The Novi Pazar handball club decided to leave the First League of Serbia since a match delegate refused to react to the chants of Ratko Mladić's name by Red Star Handball Club supporters (Portal Analitika 2021a). The chants of Mladić's name are also frequent in Serbia's national representative matches. During a football game against Montenegro's national team in March 2023 in Podgorica, Serbia's fans chanted Mladić's name and sang Serbian nationalist songs devoted to the Chetnik movement (CDM 2023).

In many towns in Serbia and Republika Srpska, one can see graffiti and murals dedicated to Karadžić and Mladić. One such graffiti is in Banjaluka in the form of a street sign that says "Radovan Karadžić Street" (Klix 2020). Belgrade is host to a large mural of Karadžić (Mihajlović 2019). Likely the most prominent example would be when in 2021, a group of extremists in Belgrade painted murals of Mladić and Dragoljub Draža Mihailović. This caused a fierce reaction from some citizens and the civil sector. The civil activists wanted the murals painted over, but the police forbade it. Two civil activists were arrested after they threw eggs at the murals. The murals were splattered with paint several times but were always promptly cleaned up (Zdravković 2021). The former Higher Representative for Bosnia and Herzegovina, Valentin Inzko, said in late 2021 that he was "shocked by the size and number of murals of war criminals" in towns across Bosnia and Herzegovina and called for their removal (Radio Slobodna Evropa 2021a). The wave of graffiti and murals in late 2021 did not bypass Montenegro; murals appeared in Podgorica, Kotor, and Herceg Novi (Aktuelno 2021).

The celebration and support of war criminals Karadžić and Mladić do not only come from personal and marginal addresses but also from official ones. In 2016, right before the elections, the Serb member of the Presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Milorad Dodik, put up a sign with Karadžić's name at the newly opened student home in Pale. The sign was removed in late 2020 (RTCG 2020).

After Mladić's conviction in November 2017, Dodik said that Mladić was a "true hero and patriot" (Radio Slobodna Evropa 2017). On the occasion of the second verdict against Mladić in June 2021, a video was published on the official Facebook page of Dodik's party – the League of Independent Social Democrats (SNSD) – titled "The General has today become part of history" (Radio Slobodna Evropa 2021b).

The Serbian Orthodox Church (SPC) proved itself a significant ally of convicted war criminals during the wars of the 1990s. The sympathizing of the SPC's leadership with Karadžić and Mladić continued long after that. In 2005, the ICTY's

chief prosecutor, Carla Del Ponte, publicly accused the SPC of helping them hide in Montenegro (PCNEN 2005). Six years later, in an interview, the metropolitan of the SPC in Montenegro, Amfilohije Radović, admitted that he had offered shelter to Karadžić in one of the Montenegrin monasteries (Jovićević 2011). After Mladić was convicted in 2017, Patriarch Irinej of the SPC called the verdict a "devil's work" (Portal Analitika 2017).

Numerous priests of the SPC can frequently be seen at gatherings of extremist movements where war criminals are celebrated, primarily Mladić and Karadžić. Their "activity" is present in Srebrenica itself. Thus, in October 2022, a group of SPC priests led a religious procession through Srebrenica and stopped in front of SDA (Party of Democratic Action) offices, where they read prayers (N1 BiH 2022). Shortly before Christmas Eve and Day in January 2020, a column of cars passed by the Memorial Center and Potočari cemetery, where victims of the genocide are buried. On that occasion, those passing blared their car horns and sang Serbian nationalist songs (Radio Slobodna Evropa 2020b). In September 2014, near the Memorial Center and one of the mass graves, a new Serbian church was built and opened (Al Jazeera 2014). Near Srebrenica stands Karno Monastery, whose hegumen, Luka Babić, is known for posing for photographs dressed in Chetnik uniform and holding guns, as well as for organizing gatherings where Chetnik songs are sung (Radio Sarajevo 2022).

Sports chants are not the only expressions that celebrate genocide and war criminals. Commercial songs are also prone to this. Songs are often played at festivals, celebrations, and weddings. There are many of these songs, and several new ones come out each year, which reflects their popularity and the number of those who harbor extremist ideologies.

The internet is full of these songs and recordings of occasions where they are performed live. One of the most popular ones has the lyrics "Oh Pazar, new Vukovar, oh Sjenica, new Srebrenica," calling for the ethnic cleansing and slaughter of Bosniaks in the Serbian towns of Novi Pazar and Sjenica. On YouTube, one can find various recordings of this song performed live at weddings and at a celebration of a child's birth, in which police officers from Priboj are the ones singing (Sandžak Press 2013, Sandžak-Bošnjaci 2022). In that video, we hear the lyrics, "Srebrenica you are dear to us, by God you'll repeat thrice."

There are many more songs about Karadžić and Mladić. In one song titled "Bula should know," the viral duo Žare and Goci sings the following lyrics: "I was born where there were no Mosques, I have hated Muslims since I was little" (Superton Official 2015). In another song, the same duo celebrates Karadžić and ethnic cleansing, singing: "Radovan, what more could you want, half of Bosnia writes in Cyrillic" (OrthodoxPower 2010).

On the occasion of the second verdict against Mladić, a new lineup of the duo, Goci and Lazo, recorded a song dedicated to him. In it, Mladić is called a hero and compared to Stepa Stepanović and Živojin Mišić, the Serbian military leaders of World War I. One line says: "I will tell them shortly, all Serbs are Mladić Ratko" (SreĆko 2021).

There are dozens of other songs on YouTube that celebrate Karadžić and Mladić. Among them are some that are performed with the traditional Montenegrin musical instrument – the gusle.

The most popular song celebrating Radovan Karadžić is the song "From Bihać to Petrovac Selo." This song was recorded in 1992 and has become known worldwide among Islamophobic and far-right circles. With the help of the online meme culture, the song became known as "Serbia strong" or "Remove kebab." Online, one could find a considerable number of various interpretations of this song. Its chorus says: "Karadžić lead your Serbs, show that they do not fear anyone." Brenton Tarrant, the attacker in the Christchurch (New Zealand) mosque massacre, played this song during the live-streamed car ride preceding his attack in which he would cold-bloodedly murder 51 Muslims. Tarrant stated in his manifesto, which was found shortly after his arrest, that "more recently I have been working part-time as a kebab removalist" (Coalson 2019).

In numerous television programs across Serbia and Republika Srpska, war criminals are celebrated, and in some, they are frequent guests. The Serbian Happy TV is undoubtedly at the forefront in this regard and, at one point, even had Mladić himself as a guest by phone from The Hague's prison (TV Happy 2018). Furthermore, Radovan Karadžić is a frequent columnist for some Serbian media in which he comments on various political topics such as the war in Ukraine and many others (Karadžić 2022).

Triumphalism, in this sense, is something unique to Srebrenica. The mass celebration of war criminals, their crimes, and the genocide itself poses a serious problem for society. Addressing it is made more difficult by the unwillingness of the state to act and react on moral grounds. Moreover, Serbia's recognition of a crime but not genocide motivates disturbers to continue with triumphalism.

By doing so, they make war criminals into unique "rock stars." Those free often appear on TV shows, and those in prison are given the opportunity to be heard by millions, which generally makes their incarceration and punishment pointless.

Calls for a repetition of ethnic cleansing and genocide are also an everyday occurrence. Of course, this is a product of systematic and widespread nationalism promoted by the top governmental officials and religious leaders.

In the majority opinion, denial is the final stage of each genocide. Stanton (1996), who created the classification, stated that the social elites, i.e., lawyers, diplomats, and even politicians or religious officials, often deny genocides. This section deals with those who represent the religious leadership in Serbia, the Republika Srpska entity, and Montenegro.

Jones (2022: 171) says that genocide denial can be divided into two kinds – state-sponsored and freelance. However, freelance denial cannot have an impact without the state's support and is often marginalized.

The fact that a genocide had occurred in Srebrenica is generally accepted by most of the world. The deniers are discredited, and their claims are proven false (Hoare 2017: 10). However, the campaign and attempts to deny the genocide are still ongoing. The question is: why? It is not hard to answer when we consider

Jones's claim. We can conclude that the denial of the Srebrenica genocide is based on political and state interests. Like the genocide itself that was conducted with vast logistical and institutional support, its denial, too, is institutional.

In September 2002, the Government of Republika Srpska published the "Report about case Srebrenica," which explicitly denies the genocide. The report states that no more than 1,900 Bosniak soldiers died in combat and that around 100 of them died as prisoners of war. The report denied that civilians were killed in Srebrenica. Interestingly, the report came out only a month before the Republika Srpska elections (Radio Free Europe 2002).

Under pressure from the international community, a new report came out in 2004. In it, the Government of Republika Srpska admitted that between 7,000 to 8,000 Bosniaks had been executed alongside serious infringements of international humanitarian law. In November of that year, the Governemnt of Republika Srpska officially apologized for the events in Srebrenica (Brezo 2018, Wood 2004).

In March 2010, the People's Assembly of Serbia adopted the "Declaration on Srebrenica," condemning war crimes. However, the declaration does not mention genocide (Cvetković and Martinović 2010). One of the most frequent ways the Serbian political leadership denies the Srebrenica genocide is by using terms such as the "great crime" to avoid the word "genocide."

Denialist currents strengthened with the Serbian Progressive Party's (SNS) assumption of power. This is no surprise considering that the SNS was founded by former Serbian Radical Party (SRS) members. Denialism grew significantly with the emergence of a new Greater Serbian nationalism known as the "Serb world." The rise of nationalism has affected the entire region.

Thus, the Government of Republika Srpska formed a commission in 2019 to revise the 2004 report. The new report was presented in June 2021 and claimed that no genocide had occurred. It states that there were around 3,500 Bosniak victims (Radio Slobodna Evropa 2021c).

Despite the international community's threats of sanctions, Milorad Dodik remains the primary denier of the Srebrenica genocide, and he does it almost daily. Even though genocide denial has been prohibited in Bosnia and Herzegovina since 2021, Dodik does not seem to care. He continually denies the genocide even after the Prosecution of Bosnia and Herzegovina opened a case against him in March 2023 (Radio Slobodna Evropa 2023).

Tomislav Nikolić, the leader of the SNS, took power as the president of Serbia in 2012 and claimed there had been no genocide in Srebrenica but a "great crime" (Al Jazeera 2012). The following year, Nikolić apologized and asked for forgiveness in the name of Serbia but dodged calling the crimes in Srebrenica a genocide (Al Jazeera 2013).

The Serbian political leadership continued denying the Srebrenica genocide in the following years. The then prime minister of Serbia, Aleksandar Vučić, visited the Memorial Center in Potočari in 2015 and paid tribute to the victims. Vučić then said that a "great crime happened in Srebrenica" and avoided calling it a genocide by describing the events as a "horrible crime" (Danas 2019, Martinović and Bogdanović 2020).

In one interview in late 2018, the prime minister of Serbia, Ana Brnabić, stated that she "does not think that a genocide happened in Srebrenica," but that it was a "terrible crime" (Sebastian 2018). She said something similar a year later, stating that "a horrible, terrible, and massive crime had happened in Srebrenica" but avoided using the term "genocide" (Bogdanović and Martinović 2020).

The institutional denial of genocide is reflected in the financing of NGOs by Republika Srpska to deny the genocide and fabricate "some new facts." One such organization is the Srebrenica Historical Project in the Netherlands (Mulagić 2014: 166).

One of the most frequent forms of denial of the Srebrenica genocide is the justification of crimes committed there by pointing to crimes committed against Serbs. This is not only the case with the crimes against Serbs in the Podrinje region and the wars of the 1990s. Srebrenica is often compared to the sufferings of the Serbian people during World War II. The Jasenovac death camp is cited most frequently.

In April 2023, on the occasion of the Day of Remembering Jasenovac victims, Dodik said that no genocide had happened in Srebrenica but a crime and that the Serbs were the actual victims of genocide. He added that seceding Republika Srpska from Bosnia and Herzegovina and uniting it with Serbia was his ultimate goal (Danas 2023).

At the start of 2021, a movie titled "Quo Vadis, Aida?" was released. It speaks of one family's suffering during the Srebrenica genocide. The movie was nominated for the 93rd Academy Awards in the "Best International Feature Film" category. At the same time, under the patronage of Serbia's state institutions, the movie "Dara from Jasenovac" came out. It spoke of the suffering of Serbs in the titular Ustasha regime death camp in Croatia. The movie was Serbia's candidate for the Academy Awards in the same category as the former but did not receive a nomination. Many critics said that the "Dara from Jasenovac" movie was Serbia's response to the Srebrenica one. This claim is supported by the fact that the director of "Dara from Jasenovac" publicly mocked the victims of Serbian prison camps in the 1990s following the movie's premiere (N1 2020, Sarajevo Times 2020, Vele 2021).

That "Dara from Jasenovac" is a propagandistic piece that aims to stoke the flames of interethnic hatred was proven by the situation surrounding the premiere in Montenegro. After "Quo Vadis, Aida?" was scheduled for its premiere at the state-owned Radio and Television of Montenegro (RTCG) on December 29, 2021, the Prva TV scheduled the premiere of the "Dara from Jasenovac" movie for the same date and time. Prva TV is part of the Serbian television company of the same name and is close to Vučić and in Montenegro led by the pro-Serbian officials of the Democratic Front (DF). That night a protest was held in front of the RTCG's offices by DF's members, and they carried banners saying "Srebrenica was not a genocide" (Portal Analitika 2021b, Radio Slobodna Evropa 2021d).

Claims that Srebrenica was the source of Serbian "vengeance" date from the day the VRS entered Srebrenica. While entering the town, Mladić stated, "The moment has finally come for the vengeance against the Turks in these lands" (ushmmfellows

2011). The narratives of "revenge" were used by officials of the Serbian Orthodox Church. The metropolitan of the SPC in Montenegro, Amfilohije Radović, said that Srebrenica was revenge for the crimes committed by Naser Orić (Leverkühn 2022). Amfilohije mentions revenge as something positive, even though the Bible forbids any form of vengeance (Institut za izučavanje religije 2023: 961). As Anzulovic (2000: 177) concluded, "The people who should represent the moral conscience of the nation and condemn the crimes committed in the attempt to create a Greater Serbia are instead ardent nationalists and inciters of xenophobia."

The denial of the Srebrenica genocide is also present in Montenegro, especially after the pro-Serbian parties came to power in August 2020. At a discussion in the Parliament of Montenegro in March 2021, the minister of justice, Vladimir Leposavić, refused to call the crimes in Srebrenica genocide. He said that what had happened in Srebrenica was a topic for dispute and that he "was ready to admit that a genocide happened in Srebrenica when that is unequivocally concluded." Leposavić added that the ICTY verdict was, in his opinion, compromised as "it hid evidence of crimes against Serbs in Kosovo" (Hajdarpašić and Matijašević 2021).

Under the pressure of the international community and the pro-Montenegrin opposition, the Parliament of Montenegro dismissed Vladimir Leposavić as minister, and, on the same day, adopted the "Resolution on the prohibition of the denial of the Srebrenica genocide" (Radio Slobodna Evropa 2021e). However, this resolution is a "dead letter." Only a day after the resolution's adoption, the official of the DF and the mayor of Nikšić, Marko Kovačević, reacted. In a statement for one Serbian news outlet, he said that "Serbs are under attack and should defend themselves" and that he thinks that "there was no genocide in Srebrenica." The Montenegrin Prosecution accused Kovačević of inciting national and religious hatred, but he was later acquitted by the court in Podgorica (Pobjeda 2023).

Genocide denial is also part of election campaigns. Some people connected with the events in Srebrenica are often candidates for public offices.

For example, in Serbia's elections, VRS major, Svetozar Andrić, ran for public office as part of the League of Serbian Patriots (SPAS). Andrić was named commander of staff of the Drina Corps by Radovan Karadžić in 1995. The corps participated in Srebrenica and bears the greatest responsibility for the genocide. Andrić was the deputy speaker of the Municipal Assembly of Novi Beograd. Since 2020, he has been the acting member of parliament in the People's Assembly of Serbia (YIHR 2020: 23).

A study of the narratives used in Serbia's parliamentary and presidential campaigns, conducted by the Youth Initiative for Human Rights (YIHR), concluded that most parties and candidates deny the Srebrenica genocide. The Serbian Radical Party (SRS), the NADA coalition, the Sovereignists (Suverenisti), Zavetnici, and Dveri stand out above all (YIHR 2022: 8). The high representatives of these political parties openly deny that a genocide happened in Srebrenica.

The formation of this societal layer that denies and celebrates the Srebrenica genocide was slow but carefully planned. We explained in detail the process of creating revisionist narratives by the state, which are then presented to the youth.

This was conducted methodically, so a new layer of society drunken with nationalism would form, comprised of those born after the wars of the 1990s and those that were still children at the time of war. Additionally, the nationalists' assumption of power in Serbia in 2012 stoked the flames of these sentiments, especially after 2019, when we saw the ever-frequent use of the term "Serbian world" – a new form of Greater Serbian nationalism. Thus, we notice the intensified denial and celebration of genocide in Serbia, Republika Srpska, and Montenegro in the following years. We conclude that this new generation's coming of age, combined with the nationalists' rise to power, is the source of denial and celebration of genocide even greater than immediately after the war.

The influence of the Serbian nationalist currents on the citizens of Republika Srpska, Serbia, and Montenegro is dangerous. If we look at election results in the last few years, we can safely say that such narratives are generally accepted. From this, we conclude that if this trend continues, the region's future does not look bright. Of course, there are ways to suppress genocide denial.

6. Conclusion

All genocides have one common characteristic. After the killing is over comes the denial that the killings happened. Such denial usually comes from the perpetrators and those who share their ideology. Gregory Stanton named denial as the final stage of genocide. This means that genocides do not end with the final bullet shot or the last swing of a machete. They continue so long as the last denier lives. That is the case with the Srebrenica genocide.

With a desire to create an ethnically homogeneous Greater Serbia, Serbian nationalists have strived to clean the territories they wished to be part of the said ethnically great state. This could only be achieved in two ways – persecution and murder. Unfortunately, both were carried out during the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Ethnic cleansing became a widespread method in the homogenization of territories. Hundreds of thousands of people would be banished from their ancestral homes just because they had the wrong first and last names. Also, tens of thousands of men, women, and children would be killed.

The town of Srebrenica was a major strategic position and a target during the entire war. Serbian ideologues believed that its geographical position in eastern Bosnia, along the Serbian border, meant that it belonged to the newly-formed state – Republika Srpska. On the contrary, the two parts of the new state would be cut off from one another, and the Drina River would once again represent a border.

In 1995, the Serbian forces began losing the war, and their plan for a homogeneous Serbian state comprised of parts of Bosnia and Herzegovina grew ever more unrealistic. Srebrenica was a major barrier to that. Thus, the Bosnian Serb leadership decided to capture the protected Srebrenica enclave.

Due to the attack on Srebrenica in July 1995, many Bosniaks who sought shelter in the safe zone headed for the United Nations base in Potocari. Some men tried to

escape through the dense woods into the Bosniak-controlled territories. Only a third of them survived the journey.

In the days that followed, thousands of men seeking safety behind blue helmets would be sent to the gallows. The total number of men killed would surpass 8,000. Their bodies would end up buried in numerous mass graves.

After everyone noticed that a vast number of men were missing, and as survivors began to appear, assumptions arose that international humanitarian law had been violeted. After the war ended and research began, it was concluded that the men had been killed.

Each genocide must be well organized and planned. This was also the case with Srebrenica. Apart from organized executions performed by the Army of Republika Srpska, the members of its Ministry of the Interior, and paramilitary groups, there were also activities covering up the genocide.

Along with the military, the entire municipal services from Serbian towns were employed to cover up the genocide. Mass graves were dug through, and the victims' remains were scattered in dozens and hundreds of secondary and tertiary graves to cover up the genocide committed and to prevent victim identification.

However, their attempts failed, and with the help of modern technologies, many graves have been uncovered and many victims identified. Thousands of victims have been found and re-buried at the Potocari cemetery. Some families still await the discovery of their loved ones' remains.

The ICTY and domestic courts in Serbia and in Bosnia and Herzegovina convicted dozens of war criminals. Among them, Radovan Karadžić and Ratko Mladić bear the greatest responsibility for the genocide and were sentenced to life imprisonment. Dozens of others who directly participated in the executions are yet to be convicted.

After the war had ended and the first verdicts for the Srebrenica genocide came, a massive denialist movement arose primarily in Serbia and Republika Srpska. The deniers are usually politicians and religious officials but also ordinary people. Since this is a case of systematic and organized genocide denial, we can say that it is a form of a state project. The governing elites profit from strong nationalist sentiments since it guarantees their position of power. Nationalism brings in the cheapest votes.

Apart from the direct denial of genocide by politicians and religious officials, the state has a major role in historical revisionism. Through revising history and fabricating its own view on events that has nothing to do with the facts, an attempt is made to create a new generation of nationalists. This dangerous narrative creates fertile ground for the growth of intolerance and hate among the Balkan peoples.

Triumphalism, or the celebration of genocide, is one of the key characteristics of Srebrenica genocide denial. We can say that genocide denial evolved into a new triumphalist phase. All across Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, Montenegro, and the Serbian diaspora worldwide, the killings of Bosniaks in Srebrenica in July 1995 are celebrated. This usually happens at sports events, through various chants and banners calling for the genocide's repetition; commercial songs; the celebration of war criminals; and so on. This is the most dangerous form of genocide denial since it proves the existence of a group that wishes to commit it again.

It is challenging to end genocide denial, especially since it is such a well-organized project, supported by governing structures. However, it is not impossible. Of course, a broad and strong response by society's democratic elements is necessary. We primarily mean the judiciary, non-governmental and international organizations, religious communities, scientific institutions, cultural creators, and artists.

Above all, it is necessary to demystify denialist narratives in ways close to ordinary people. Music, film, photography, art, and social media, are just some ways the common, propaganda-inflicted man could be approached. Naturally, this requires strength of will, finances, and personal bravery.

Srebrenica genocide denial will likely go on for at least another few decades. The rise of nationalism and populism evident around the globe will make the matter more pronounced. Unfortunately, that kills the victims again and inflicts pain on their families.

However, in post-conflict societies and societies lacking democracy, optimism is crucial – optimism for a better, more just future. Even though that optimism is often shaken to the core, especially after what is happening in Ukraine, it must not perish.

The fight between good and evil has been waged since time immemorial. If good were to surrender, then evil would rule, and that would be our end. We cannot allow that. The same goes for the fight for a free and democratic Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Data availability statement

All data supporting the findings are contained within this article and its referenced sources.

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Appendix

The death and funeral of Ratko Mladić: a new wave of triumphalism and denial

Ratko Mladić, the convicted war criminal and former commander of the Bosnian Serb Army, died on August 27, 2026, at the age of 84 in the UN detention unit in The Hague (Protić and Anđeljković 2026). His death was met with widespread mourning in Serbia and the celebration of his figure and deeds as those of a national hero. Logically, the question arose regarding the transfer of his remains and his burial, for which there were justified concerns that it would become an act of glorification of a war criminal and denial of his actions, namely, the genocide (Raskrinkavanje 2026).

Despite international condemnation and warnings from the European Union, he was buried in Belgrade on September 7, 2026, with full state and military honors, closely resembling the funeral of a national hero. Many statesmen and politicians from Serbia, Republika Srpska, and Montenegro attended the funeral or expressed their condolences to the Mladić family. For example, the speaker of the Parliament of Montenegro, Andrija Mandić, expressed his condolences to Ratko Mladić's son.

This act was met with strong condemnation both domestically and internationally, and an initiative for Mandić's dismissal was also launched (Mudreša 2026).

In the days following Mladić's funeral, a significantly increased level of glorification of his figure and deeds, as well as an open denial of the Srebrenica genocide, became evident. Murals depicting him have been painted, graffiti bearing his name has become a frequent occurrence, and attempts to rehabilitate him in the public sphere by various actors in social life have also been evident (Danas 2026).

Such behavior represents an evident form of genocide triumphalism, in which a convicted war criminal sentenced to life imprisonment is celebrated. The fact that such practices have continued even after so many years demonstrates that denial of the Srebrenica genocide is not a matter of the past but rather an everyday occurrence that perpetuates interethnic hatred and prevents any form of reconciliation.

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