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Genocide In A Small Space: a Comparative Case Study of Srebrenica and Koriukivka

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The massacre in Srebrenica was organized by the Bosnian Serbs in 1995. Koriukivka, a large settlement in Chernihiv region was completely destroyed by the Nazis in 1943, together with the population.

Key words: *genocide, Srebrenica, Koriukivka, Bosnian Serbs, Nazis.*

The Krstic Decision

The murder of over 7,000 military-aged Bosnian Muslim men by the Bosnian Serb Army in and around the Srebrenica enclave in July of 1995 remains the worst atrocity to occur on European soil since the Second World War. The massacre itself was the culmination of a three year long struggle for control of the Srebrenica enclave and the greater Drina river valley, a region that held strategic importance to Bosnian Serb Forces and was vital for their national aspirations of an independent Serbian polity in Bosnia. Like the events in Rwanda that occurred two years prior, the Srebrenica massacre took place under the watchful eye of UN security forces who failed to act. It was only after the shelling of the Merkale Market in Sarajevo by Bosnian Serb forces on August 28th, 1995, over a month after the massacre in Srebrenica, that NATO launched an air campaign, which in conjunction with a combined Croatian and Bosnian ground offensive, brought an end to the war¹.

The sheer savagery of the Bosnian War evoked images that had not been seen on the European continent since the Second World War. The

¹ See information on Operation Deliberate Force Robinson, Piers. "Misperception in foreign policy making: Operation 'deliberate force' and the ending of war in Bosnia." *Civil Wars* 4, no. 4 (2001): 115–126.

pictures of starved men, women, and children in both Serb-run prison camps and besieged "safe" areas, harkened back to the horrors of the Holocaust. These images resonated in the eyes of the international community, which following the end of the conflict, wasted no time in putting the perpetrators on trial. Ultimately, it was the case against Radislav Krstic that would prove to be landmark.

In the trial against Radislav Krstic, commander of the VRS Drina Corps and key figure behind the Srebrenica Massacre, the ICTY (International Criminal Tribunal Former Yugoslavia) by evoking article II c¹ of the 1948 Genocide convention, was able to secure a guilty verdict. The verdict, however, was controversial, as the prosecution stretched the meaning of article II c by limiting the geographic area to which it applied. The prosecution was also vague concerning the definition of the term "in part" of the victim group in relation to article II c of the genocide convention.² In essence the intention to kill, in whole or in part (by the VRS), referred to the Bosnian Muslims within Srebrenica enclave only.³ The defense offered convincing arguments against the genocide charges, contending that was there no evidence to indicate that the Muslim population (of Srebrenica) formed a distinctive national, ethnic, racial, or religious group as outlined in the 1948 genocide convention.⁴ The defense also argued that 7,500 military age males did not comprise a significant portion of the Bosnian Muslim group as a whole both within and outside the Srebrenica enclave.⁵ Furthermore, the defense contended that had the VRS intended to destroy the Muslim population as such, they would not have taken the effort to transport the women, children, and the elderly out of the area.⁶ The Trial Chamber, however, saw the VRS actions in a different light. According to

¹ Article II c of the 1948 genocide convention is defined as Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part; In the case of Srebrenica the meaning of this definition was stretched to include members of a group within a specific geographic area.

² "In its final trial brief, the Prosecution chose to define the group as the Bosnian Muslims of Srebrenica while it referred to the Bosnian Muslims of Eastern Bosnia in its final arguments." See Krstić, Prosecutor V. Radislav. "Case No. IT-98-33-T, Trial Judgement. (Aug. 2, 2001)".

⁴ See Krstić, Prosecutor V. Radislav. "Case No. IT-98-33-T, Trial Judgement, Aug. 2, 2001.)" Pg. 195.

⁵ See Krstić, Prosecutor V. Radislav pg. 210 "The killing of up to 7,500 members of a group, the Bosnian Muslims, that numbers about 1,4 million people does not evidence an intent to destroy a "substantial" part of the group. To the Defense, 7,500 dead are not even substantial when compared to the 40,000 Bosnian Muslims of Srebrenica".

⁶ See Krstić, Prosecutor V. Radislav Pg. 211.

the Trial Chamber prosecution "Bosnian Serb forces could not have failed to know, by the time they decided to kill all the men, that this selective destruction of the group would have a lasting impact upon the entire group"¹. The trial chamber also concluded that "the Bosnian Serb forces knew, by the time they decided to kill all of the military-aged men, that the combination of those killings with the forcible transfer of the women, children and elderly would inevitably result in the physical disappearance of the Bosnian Muslim population at Srebrenica"².

Controversy behind the Krstic Decision

While the Krstic decision would usher Srebrenica into the annals of genocide studies, the Trial Chambers verdict has not been met without scholarly criticism. Legal scholar Katherine Southwick argues that "by excluding consideration of the perpetrators' motives, such as seeking to eliminate a military threat, the Krstic chamber's standard for establishing specific intent to destroy the Bosnian Muslims, in whole or in part, was incomplete"³. In other words, knowledge that the murder of 7,000 Muslim men of the Srebrenica Enclave would inflict catastrophic and lasting damage on the community as whole does not imply that the intent or motivation of the perpetrators to destroy the group in that capacity. Another problematic feature of the Srebrenica genocide narrative is its limited geographic constraints. Although the 1948 genocide convention does not place geographical limitations on genocide, the events which occurred within the confines of the Srebrenica enclave do not exactly fit the patterns that have occurred within previous genocides. Namely, the wide spread targeting and systematic annihilation of a group in whole or in part.

Genocide as a widespread phenomenon

Some researchers such as Norman Cigar and Edina Becirevic have argued that Srebrenica was representative of more widespread genocidal campaign carried out by Bosnian Serb forces in the greater Drina river valley (Poddrinje) region in Eastern Bosnia⁴. In her monographic study entitled *Genocide On The Drina River* Becirevic does indicate that the VRS and Belgrade did indeed engage in a systematic campaign of terror and murder that targeted Bosniaks in the Podrijne region, however one major problem with her research is that she often misconstrues genocide with ethnic-cleansing. In fact of all the localities that she provides as case studies of genocide (Zvonik, Bratunac, Visegrad, Rogatica, Vlasenica,

¹ Ibid.

² Krstić, Prosecutor V. Radislav. Pg. 211.

³ Southwick, Katherine G. "Srebrenica as Genocide-The Krstic Decision and the Language of the Unspeakable." *Yale Hum. Rts. & Dev. LJ* 8 (2005): 188. Pg. 191.

⁴ See Becirevic, Edina. *Genocide on the Drina River*. Yale University Press, 2014.

and Srebrenica), in not one of these localities was the Bosniak population exterminated in whole or in part (i.e. ALL military age males)¹. It is not to say that the Bosniak populations of these localities were not impacted, the Bosnian Serb Army used extreme methods of terror in conducting its ethnic cleansing campaigns which included murder, rape, intimidation, and torture in Becirevic's words; "Towns were shelled, weapons were confiscated and properties seized from Bosniaks, and civilians were murdered, expelled, or taken to concentration camps"².

Yet missing from Becirevic's genocide argument is the fact that in almost every locality, the vast majority of the Bosniak population was not prevented from fleeing. The fact that VRS forces allowed a substantial portion of the Bosniak population to flee sits in stark contrast to almost every other genocide in history. In Pol-Pot's genocide, for example, Cambodia's ethnic Vietnamese population was destroyed in its entirety³. For a more narrow geographic scope in the city of Kibuye, during the Rwandan genocide, 74 to 84 % of the Tutsi population was destroyed⁴.

Perhaps it is difficult to find a proper classification for Srebrenica and the VRS Drina river campaign as they bear some elements of all three major crimes (War crimes, Crimes against humanity, and genocide). By looking even further into the past one can find even more poignant examples which illustrate the trifecta of crimes seen in Srebrenica yet with some notable contrasting features. An incident similar in scale and scope took place in the village Koriukivka, in Ukraine in March of 1943. The massacre referred to in Ukrainian as the *Koriukivska Tragediya* (Koriukivska Tragedy) remains the most deadly "punitive" action carried out by the Germans during the entire war.

Koriukivka

The village of Koriukivka is situated in the northern part of Chernihiv Oblast not far from the Belarusian border. Heavily forested and located far away from main roads⁵ Koriukivka and its surrounding environs became the

¹ The defense pointed out during the Krstic trial that a portion of the military male population of Srebrenica was allowed to pass through to the safe zone. See Krstić, Prosecutor V. Radislav.

² See Becirevic, Edina. Genocide on the Drina River. Pg. 85.

³ See Kiernan, Ben. The Pol Pot regime: race, power, and genocide in Cambodia under the Khmer Rouge, 1975-79. Yale University Press, 2002. Pg. 292.

⁴ Straus, Scott. The order of genocide: Race, power, and war in Rwanda. Cornell University Press, 2013. Pg. 54 see also Verwimp, Philip. "Death and survival during the 1994 genocide in Rwanda." *Population Studies* 58.2 (2004): 233–245. For alternative statistics.

⁵ See Білоус Олександр, Шевченко Марина. Без права на забуття... До історії Одного Спаленого українського села. *Сіверянський літопис*. № 1–3. 2014. 115.

epicenter of the Soviet Partisan movement in Ukraine. Although Koriukivka raion was captured by German and Hungarian troops in September of 1941, Axis forces were not able to establish complete control over the town until winter of that year¹. During the first months of the occupation, partisans under the command of Oleksiy Fedorov were able to entrench themselves in the surrounding woods and made frequent incursions into the village. These raids were at times extremely violent, villagers were routinely robbed of their food², and those suspected in any way of aiding Axis forces were often tortured and killed³. The Germans were able to exploit the ambivalent relationship Fedorov's partisans had with the local population,⁴ carrying out arrests of communists and their sympathizers. Around 400 people were arrested and shot⁵. By the 13th of December 1941 the German Order Police had declared the area "clear of bandits"⁶. The Partisans, however, merely retreated into the forests. Their ranks were replenished by defectors from the Ukrainian auxiliary police, by winter 1942–43 they would regroup and continue their guerrilla campaign⁷. During the lull in fighting the Germans liquidated Koriukivka's Jewish population, executing those who had not been fortunate enough to evacuate during the summer of 1941⁸.

Following the German defeat at Stalingrad, Soviet partisan attacks in Ukraine increased. In February of 1943 alone, Soviet partisans in Ukraine destroyed or damaged 800 locomotive carriages⁹. In Koriukivka the partisan attacks became more brazen. In February¹⁰, aided by informants and defectors in the Ukrainian Auxiliary police, partisans seized control of the village center¹¹. Their success was short lived. On the 24th of February, elements of the Hungarian 105th light infantry division expelled the

¹ Білоус, Олександр Шевченко, Марина. Pg. 115.

² Ibid.

³ Gogun, Alexander. *Stalin's Commandos: Ukrainian Partisan Forces on the Eastern Front*. IB Tauris, 2015. See pages 84, 96 and 100.

⁴ Gogun, Alexander. *Stalin's Commandos: Ukrainian Partisan Forces on the Eastern Front*. Pg. 84.

⁵ Herasymov, Ivan Oleksandrovych. 2003. *Knyha skorboty Ukraïny. Chernihivs'ka oblast'*. Chernihiv: Desñiãns'ka pravda. Pg. 248.

⁶ Білоус Олександр, Шевченко Марина. Без права на забуття... До історії одного спаленого Українського села.

⁷ Білоус Олександр, Шевченко Марина. Pg. 115.

⁸ The "action" against the Jewish population of Koriukivka was carried out in January of 1942. See ⁸ Herasymov, Ivan Oleksandrovych. 2003. *Knyha skorboty Ukraïny. Chernihivs'ka oblast'*. Pg. 248.

⁹ Gogun, Alexander see diagram 1.

¹⁰ See Білоус Олександр, Шевченко Марина. Pg 115. The exact date of attack is not given.

¹¹ Ibid.

partisans from Koriukivka¹. The next day the division was replaced by a unit of the German fieldgendarme. This unit proceeded to arrest 450 citizens of Koriukivka suspected of aiding and abetting the partisans. Among those captured were two sons of partisan leader Fedor Mikhailovich Stupak².

On the evening of February 27–28th, the partisans launched a raid against the barracks at Koriukivka railway station, where German and Hungarian forces were garrisoned. According to archival documents the partisans destroyed eighteen rail cars and killed around the same amount of gendarmes³. Of the prisoners held hostage ninety three were liberated, including Fedor Stupak's two sons⁴. Any celebration of victory was short lived. The February 27th attack sealed the fate of Koriukivka.

Massacre

On March 1st Germans from the 56th fieldgendarme battalion and a unit of Ukrainian auxiliary policemen, a force of approximately five hundred men,⁵ arrived in Koriukivka from the nearby city of Schors. A portion of this force encircled Koriukivka while another entered the village. All citizens of Koriukivka were then ordered to the town square under the pretext that their documents needed to be checked. Instead, people were marched at gunpoint in groups of fifty to one-hundred into nearby buildings. In the theater, dining hall, two schools, district administration center, and health clinic, Koriukivka's citizens, men, women, and children were executed at pointblank range by machine-gun fire. Those who were not shot were thrown into buildings and immolated. On the site of the dining hall alone, over five hundred people were killed. A survivor of the massacre at the dining hall, Evgeniy Rymar, recounts a harrowing tale: *"In March 1943, a German murder squad of about 1,000 members arrived in Koryukovka, surrounded the town, and prevented people from leaving it. Then they began to take people to the restaurant "to check their documents." The "checking of the documents" was carried out in the following way. They found us, about 300 people, including my family and myself [hiding] in silage pits. They took us under guard along Vokzalnaya Street and then Shevchenko Street to the restaurant. There they lined us up and proceeded to push 2 people at a time into the restaurant and shot them. My turn came: I held my*

¹ Ibid.

² Білоус Олександр, Шевченко Марина. Рг. 116.

³ Слатан Олександр. Мовою Документів: аналіз факту партизанської фальсифікації причин корюківської трагедії 1943 року. Сіверянський літопис. 2015. Рг. 48.

⁴ Білоус Олександр, Шевченко Марина. Рг. 116–117.

⁵ Some estimates place the size of the force at 1000. See GARF 7021-78-14, copy YVA JM/19994 accessed via http://www.yadvashem.org/untoldstories/database/chgkSovietReports.asp?cid=470&site_id=636.

daughter, who was 7 years old, in my arms. After I had entered and taken a few steps, a German shot me and I immediately fell and lost consciousness. I was unconscious for about a day. I regained consciousness, but could not get away because I was covered with bodies and because I had been shot in the eye and in the side. Later I heard a woman groaning and I asked if anyone [else] was still alive. I asked for help to get out. A woman named Moiseenko – I do not remember her first name – and another woman came, pulled me out from under the bodies, and helped me get out. I went home and then proceeded to [the village of] Sukhotovka, where I have been living since. These two women were later shot by the Germans. In the course of two days the [murder] squad burned all the houses [in the town]. They also shot people in the restaurant, caught others and shot them on roads and in the railroad yard, and threw three more people alive into a fire."¹ In total, around seven thousand people were murdered in the span of two days and most of Koriukivka's buildings were burned.² Of those murdered, only the identities of 1,088 have been confirmed.³ After the war, the Koriukivka was rebuilt and its population reestablished, however almost all of its inhabitants would be transplants. Very few people survived the massacre in Koriukivka.

Conclusions and Analysis

The massacres that took place in Srebrenica and Koriukivka bear certain similarities to each other. Both incidents took place in areas fraught with warfare, often with the locality changing hands several times leading up to the massacre. Both resulted in a similar death toll. These incidents differ in the totality of punishment dealt to the populations. After a lengthy court battle, the ICTY concluded that the VRS intended to destroy the Srebrenica Bosnian Muslim population, in part, vis-à-vis the execution of the military-age men. In the case of Koriukivka, there is little doubt that the Germans and their allies intended to destroy Koriukivka's population (mostly ethnic Ukrainians), as a whole. If the same standard of intent⁴ and geographic parameters used by the ICTY during the Krstic trial were applied to the Koriukivka massacre, there is little doubt that the Germans would be

¹ GARF 7021-78-14, copy YVA JM/19994 accessed via http://www.yadvashem.org/untoldstories/database/chgkSovietReports.asp?cid=470&site_id=636.

² See Поташній Юрій. 2011. Кориюківка: забута трагедія. Як нацисти знищили тисячне містечко. *Історична Правда*. URL:<http://www.istpravda.com.ua/articles/2011/03/2/28636/>

³ Ibid.

⁴ Katherine Southwick's argues that the ICTY adopted a different standard of intent, which included knowledge that the destruction of the Bosniak male population would have lasting impact as whole on the group.

found guilty of committing genocide against the ethnic Ukrainians (of Koriukivka). However, if the incident is looked at only on its own merit, without taking to consideration the greater context of German occupation in Chernihiv oblast or even Ukraine as a whole, the Koriukivka massacre more resembles a war crime or a crime against humanity. This is the reason why analysis of patterns of mass-murder against a targeted group or groups across a wide geographical area is so crucial in determining genocide. A closer look at the patterns of mass-murder in Chernihiv Oblast reveals some staggering statistics. For instance, Koriukivka was one of 61–75 villages in the oblast that were totally or partially destroyed¹. Due to the influence of Nazi racial ideology, many if not most of these massacres followed the same pattern as Koriukivka, meaning the total destruction of the (Slavic) population of the locality. Although the Germans did not launch the same sort of systematic campaign of genocide against Slavic peoples in the Soviet territories that they would with the Jewish and Roma populations, Slavs still had no place in the Nazi utopian schema and were seen as largely expendable. Heinrich Himmler stated that "thirty million Slavs would have to starve to death" in order for Germany to be adequately supplied with food. Although Himmler's starvation plan never came to fruition, the expendability of Slavic lives can be starkly seen in Chernihiv oblast². In Chernihiv oblast's three largest cities (Chernihiv, Pryluky, and Nizhyn) roughly a quarter to half of the population did not survive the two years of German occupation.³ According to official statistics Chernihiv oblast lost over 127,000 civilians during the German occupation.⁴ The question that remains is can the 127,000 civilians who died during the course of the German occupation in Chernihiv oblast be considered victims of genocide. It can be said for sure that at least 3,000 of these victims Chernihiv's Jewish and Roma do fit into the genocide category. But for the remaining victims,

¹ See Кривошея В. В. (співголова), к. держ. упр., Стрілець М. І. (співголова), д. і. н. Веденєєв Д. В. (заступник голови) Бутко С. В., к. держ. упр. Спалені села і селища Чернігівщини в 1941–1943 роках: злочини проти цивільного населення. Чернігів: Український інститут національної пам'яті; Чернігівська обласна державна адміністрація, 2013. For a list of all the localities destroyed by the Germans in Chernihiv Oblast.

² See Browning, Christopher R. *Nazi policy, Jewish workers, German killers*. Cambridge University Press, 2000. Pg. 23.

³ Коваленко О. Б., Подкур Р. Ю., Лисенко О. В. *Чернігівщина в роки нацистської окупації: документи і матеріали / КЗ "Пошукове агентство по створенню науково-документальних серіалів "Книга Пам'яті" та "Реабілітовані історією" Чернігівської обласної ради*. Чернігів. 2013. Pg. 354–355.

⁴ Herasymov, Ivan Oleksandrovych. 2003. *Книга skorboty Ukrainy. Chernihivs'ka oblast'*. Chernihiv: Desnians'ka pravda. See preface

Chernihiv oblast's Ukrainians and Russians, there was never any such order to exterminate. Only a general policy of racism existed that was followed for the most part in most localities in the occupied territories of Ukraine and other parts of the Soviet Union. Perhaps in this case, less importance should be placed on intent and motive, and more importance should be placed on actions and results.

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**Геноцид на маленькому просторі: порівняльне вивчення подій
у Сребрениці та Корюківці**

Грегори Аймаро-Пармут – аспірант факультету досліджень у Росії та Східній Європі університету штату Індіана. В центрі його наукових студій – Чернігівська область під німецькою окупацією. Інші його дослідницькі інтереси включають у себе історію сталінських репресій, тоталітарних режимів і Голодомору. Автор є американським громадянином, що має українські корені. Його предки походили з Припук. Ця стаття являє собою порівняльне дослідження подій, які мали місце в Сребрениці та Корюківці. Різанина в Сребрениці була організована боснійськими сербами в 1995 р. Корюківка, великий населений пункт у Чернігівській області, у 1943 р. була повністю знищена нацистами разом з населенням.

Ключові слова: геноцид, Сребрениця, Корюківка, боснійські серби, нацисти.

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**Геноцид на маленьком пространстве: сравнительное исследование событий в
Сребренице и Корюковке**

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Ключевые слова: геноцид, Сребреница, Корюковка, боснийские сербы, нацисты.