

**Commemorating Genocide by Marching:
The Place of Space in Memorialization and Resistance
Practices of the Srebrenica Genocide**

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Introduction

The Marš Mira is a time to think intensely about the war. We should think about the current situation, what to do and what the future of Bosnia is going to be. What can be done?

- Almina¹

Every year between the 8th and 10th of July, several thousand people gather to remember the 1995 Srebrenica Genocide.² This is done by marching a three-day long march, known as the Marš Mira. Almina, one of the participants, reflects on the purpose of this yearly commemoration. Her words demonstrate that there are various different motivations for participating in the Marš Mira. On the one hand she stresses the importance of memorialization of the war past, specifically the Srebrenica genocide. On the other hand, she emphasizes that the conflict is not in the past. According to Almina, the march is an opportunity to show resistance to a situation in which there still is a lack of justice and of acknowledgement of the crimes committed during the war.

In the summer of 1995, Serb forces under the command of Ratko Mladić murdered more than 8,000 Bosnian Muslims, mostly boys and men, in the valley of Srebrenica. Since 2005, the

¹ Throughout this article pseudonyms have been used to protect the privacy of the respondents.

² It must be noted that in 2020, during the 25-year commemoration of the genocide, the number of participants was severely limited as a consequence of the COVID-19 pandemic. This was a major setback for the community, given the fact that the 25-year commemoration was a year during which a significant amount of additional attention should have been devoted to Srebrenica, both inside Bosnia and Herzegovina and internationally.

Marš Mira participants yearly retrace the steps of the victims. The Srebrenica genocide has been called one of the worst massacres of the twentieth century (Naimark 2011; Ryngaert and Schrijver 2015). The genocide took place on land that was later allotted to Serb controlled Republika Srpska, upon the signing of the Dayton Accords that put an end to the violent war in December 1995. Despite the presence of a peace accord, the occurrence of genocide has been and still is denied by the Serbian government as well as the Serb president of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Milorad Dodik (Lakic 2018).³ Twenty-five years on, Bosnia and Herzegovina continues to struggle with strained relations between its ethnic groups, both on a political and on a social level. According to a large part of the population, there is still no justice regarding the war crimes committed during the Bosnian civil war (Bell 2018, 3; Hasanovic 2016; Hasanovic & Petrila 2021; Nuhanovic 2007, 2019). Looking at how the Bosnian community commemorates the atrocities, authors have discussed the Srebrenica-Potočari Genocide Memorial Center, established in 2003 (Braun 2014; Cohen 2017; Pollack 2003) as well as the annual commemoration of the genocide internationally (Halilovich 2015). The Marš Mira is a less investigated practice of commemoration of the Srebrenica genocide, one that is characterized by its active and participatory nature, as participants engage in a three-day march through the landscape where the atrocities took place. Beyond memorializing the victims of the genocide, the march is also an act of resistance to the (Bosnian) Serb denial narrative that remains dominant in the area. Every year for the duration of the march, the area that is now part of Republika Srpska is claimed by the thousands of participants of the Marš Mira as an integral part of both Bosnian land and memory.

In this paper, we adopt the Marš Mira as a case-study to inquire into the ways in which the two different processes addressed above, resistance against denial of the Srebrenica genocide and memorialization of the genocide, intersect. It is necessary to address these intersections, in order to gain more insight into the challenges post-conflict societies face. In this paper we argue that resistance against genocide denial and memorialization of the genocide are intricately interwoven in the incentives of Bosnian Muslims participating in the annual Marš Mira and that they manifest themselves in the use of the landscape in which the march takes place.⁴ We explore these intersections in order to arrive at a better understanding of the challenges Bosnian Muslims still face a quarter century after the genocide. Data to support this argument were gathered by the authors through intensive ethnographic fieldwork during the three days of

³ After the Dayton Accords, Bosnia and Herzegovina was divided into two separate entities: Republika Srpska and the Muslim/Croat Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina. The presidency has been divided between the three main ethnic groups of the country, with each group having one seat in presidency.

⁴ The respondents included in this research consist of both Bosnian Muslims living in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Bosnian Muslims living in diaspora. Many Bosnian families fled the country during the war and the diaspora constitutes an important part of the community.

the Marš Mira and the following yearly commemoration of the Srebrenica Genocide on July 11th, 2019. While participating in the march, the authors conducted twenty semi-structured interviews with Bosnian Muslim participants.⁵ Participant observation before, during and after the march constituted the second pillar of the fieldwork for this research.

The first part of the article consists of a literature review, which starts with a discussion of the debate surrounding genocide denial and resistance against it. Consequently, we address the debate on memorialization of genocide. In each section we devote particular attention to the way space configures in the debate. We concurrently discuss how adopting a spatial lens will enable us to generate a more complex and comprehensive understanding of the intersections between processes of memorialization and resistance against genocide denial that are at play during the Marš Mira. In the second part of this article, we proceed to present the empirical findings of our research. By elaborating on the four main incentives for participation in the Marš Mira, we demonstrate that walking the march is not simply about remembering victims nor only about resisting the present Serb dominance in the Srebrenica area. In fact, resistance and memorialization are inseparable and intricately intertwined throughout the four incentives.

Resistance to Genocide Denial

Gregory Stanton (1996), the founding father of Genocide Watch, discerns ten stages of genocide, of which the last is referred to as ‘genocide denial’. Over the last decades, it has increasingly become recognized that ‘denial’ is inherently linked to genocide (Green 2020; Hovannisian 1998; Smith et al. 1995). Denial of a genocide takes place in various forms, but comes down to “a form of lying—a deliberate distortion of the facts for the sake of some presumed advantage” (Smith 2014, 104). While there are various classifications regarding genocide denial, the most prominent ones come from Stanley Cohen and Israel Charny (Smith 2014; Smith et al 1995; Stanton 2005; Parent 2016; Pégrier 2018).

Cohen roughly separates denial into the psychological status of either ‘conscious’ or ‘unconscious denial’, while asserting that “denial may be neither a matter of telling the truth nor intentionally telling a lie”, as the truth might not be wholly clear (Cohen 2001, 4-5). Denial can hence vary from an unconscious process of denial, i.e. as a defense mechanism to block off the unimaginable (Parent 2016, 40), to conscious denial as a deliberate choice to deceive (Cohen 2001, 5). Within this, Cohen (2001) indicates various everyday forms of denial, which depend on

⁵ Interviews were conducted with the help of a Bosnian translator, with the exception of a few that were conducted in English or Dutch. The respondents' ages range between 15 and 70, and were roughly equally divided between men and women. All were either Bosnian or members of the Bosnian diaspora, and some were direct survivors of the Death March or lost family members during the genocide.

the agent (victim, perpetrator or observer), the time (historical or contemporary), the organization (denial can be personal, cultural or official), and on the space or place (within your society, or outside) the genocide took place. Cohen (2001, 75) moreover makes the crucial argument that denial is often deeply embedded in society, and affirmed through popular culture, banal language codes and state encouraged legitimations. In line with this, Charny (1999; 2012) clearly discerns twelve tactics used to deny a genocide, including the questioning and minimization of the statistics, the claim that what is or has been going on doesn't fit the genocide definition or blaming the victims, stating it was 'merely' a civil war. As such, denial often becomes institutionalized, for example through the history curriculum in the school system (Altanian 2017, 16; Bilali et al. 2019; Green 2020). The case of the Srebrenica genocide shows a complex denial narrative, as not only politicians and media outlets propagate the denial narrative, but it is also deeply embedded in the religious, cultural and education institutions in Republika Srpska (Green 2020, 29).

In the transition from genocide to peace, genocide denial in any form represents a serious barrier to reconciliation (Altanian 2017; Bilali 2019, 288; Green 2020, 8). This because denial prevents victims, and society as whole, to move forward and even holds the potential for new atrocities to take place (Bilali 2019; Cohen 2001; COE 2020; Stanton 1998). Genocide denial is however rarely completely successful, there is always the collective memory of the victims that resist this narrative. On an everyday level, or during active attempts to resist denialism, friction between these two narratives become apparent. While the most obvious method to counter the denial narrative is through the punishment by an international tribunal or national courts (Green 2020), it is also crucial to focus on local expressions that resist the denial narrative. Bilali et al. (2019, 301) present different strategies that hold the potential to locally transform narratives and aim for reconciliation, such as the introduction of 'factual' information in educational books. Another strategy refers to the exposure of 'moral exemplars'⁶ of each group to young Bosnian Muslims, Serbs and Croats, which indicated an increased willingness to reconcile (Bilali et al 2019, 302; Čehajić-Clancy & Bilewicz 2017). These are noteworthy examples of imposed intentions to counteract denialism, however we may also imagine more locally embedded ways in which counter narratives are conveyed. Acts of memorialization, will be further explained in the next paragraph, should in this sense also be understood as acts of resistance to the prevailing denial of the genocide that took place.

Through these acts of resistance, the space on which the genocide took place often becomes contested. When spaces become contested, they, according to Lawrence-Zúñiga and

⁶ Members of groups in a conflict who acted in opposition to norms of violence by protecting members of the victim group, often while putting themselves or their families at risk.

Low (2007), give “material expression to and act as loci for creating and promulgating, countering and negotiating dominant cultural themes” (245). Here we must keep in mind that, in line with the memorialization practices which will be explained below, practices of resistance must also be understood as performative. Performativity should not only be understood as action, but also as creating a new reality through negotiating dominant themes. In line with this, Pile and Keith (2009) argue that resisting an existing dominant power is best done “under the noses of the oppressor” (1), since it demands attention. People who perform these acts of resistance are “responding to a dominant system” (Rose 2002, 384) and thus directly challenge that specific narrative. The creation of war memorials on the site where the atrocities took place, form an interesting example of resisting an existing narrative, aiming to produce a new one (Van Marle et al. 2012, 567). In these circumstances, interests in and perspectives on the space hold the potential to collide (Björkdahl & Buckley-Zistel 2016, 5). Many war memorials are built on spaces where a specific battle took place, therewith acknowledging the victims or heroes from one side of the conflict. By doing so, the opposing side of the conflict is left out (Simić & Volčič 2016). In this act of using space for memorialization, the space itself becomes contested. Claiming a specific space, for example in the form of a war memorial, might also contest narratives of defeat that are present in the current society. The role of memorialization after genocide will be further explored in the paragraph below.

Memorialization after genocide

The thinking about collective memory rests largely on the foundational work of Maurice Halbwachs (1925), who posited the notion that memory is not merely an individual attribute but an inherently social one. According to Halbwachs, “it is in society that people normally acquire their memories. It is also in society that they recall, recognize, and localize their memories” (in Olick et al. 2011, 18). Extending on Halbwachs’ concept of collective memory, Connerton (1989) characterized the notion of memory as embodied and performative. In his seminal work *How Societies Remember* he characterizes memory as “amassed, sedimented, in the body” (1989, 72), acquired through repetition and acts of transfer between members of a society. Connerton studied commemorative ceremonies to lay bare the ways in which bodily practices shape ritual and collective meaning making. Building forth on Connerton’s thinking, Buckley-Zistel and Schäfer’s (2014) discuss the performative nature of ceremonies specifically in the context of memorialization of mass violence. They show that rituals and actions performed during memorializations are not merely means of keeping memories alive, but also actively shape the collective memory. They are “an interactional creation of a reality or truth about past injustices”

(Buckley-Zistel & Schäfer 2014, 6). Hence, the debate on collective memory and memorialization indicates not only that memory is an inherently social phenomenon, but also stresses its performative character as collective memories depend on the rituals and actions through which they are shared and shaped.

Building forth on the theoretical legacy of Halbwachs, typically the study of collective memory and war has largely developed through a focus on the First- and Second World War, with the Holocaust as the focal point when considering the link between memory and trauma (Levy & Sznjder, 2006; Olick et al., 2011, 29-36; Sodaro, 2018, 15). The Holocaust has hence played a central role in academic work on memorialization and genocide. It has also been fundamental to the development of the term genocide in its political sense, given the origins of the term itself and its institutionalization through the UN in 1948 (UN n.d.). In developments since, other important steps have been made to encourage support for victims of mass atrocities by the international community. Memorialization has, among others, become widely accepted as one of the essential mechanisms for dealing with the past (Hodžić 2018, 183). Furthermore, the ICTJ has adopted memorialization as one of the fundamental tools in the Toolkit for Transitional Justice (ICTJ n.d.).

The Holocaust was furthermore the first instance of mass violence memorialized as extensively through the establishment of museums, memorials, documentation and so on, which some have described as a 'memory industry' (Rosenfeld 2009). To a large extent, remembrance of other atrocities have thus been based on the ways in which the Holocaust has been remembered (Sodaro 2018) The documentation and memorialization of the Holocaust has been described as an example to the memorialization of other genocides of the latter half of the Twentieth century, including in Rwanda, Argentina and Bosnia and Herzegovina (Olick et al. 2011, 44). Yet, as Sodaro and Bickford (2010) show, since the 1980's we have also witnessed a further development within practices of memorialization of mass atrocities. A shift has taken place where more focus is put on understanding the negative past to create a better future, characterized by the mantra 'never again' (68). Within this new 'paradigm', as Sodaro and Bickford (2010) call it, memorialization has come to be increasingly seen as an opportunity to educate about and reflect upon the past in order to learn from it (Haider 2016). Additionally, according to Landsberg (2004), new technologies and mass culture have radically changed the so-called 'memory industry' and have enabled new ways of engaging with events of the past in an experiential manner. When this occurs, "the person does not simply apprehend a historical narrative but takes on a more personal, deeply felt memory of a past event through which he or she did not live", she argues (2). This type of memory, which Landsberg calls 'prosthetic memory', has the potential to alter the person's consciousness and shape their subjectivity and politics (Ibid.). According to Landsberg, these new

developments provide opportunities for memorialization to bring about social change (152). The link back to the future-oriented 'never again'-paradigm is easily established.

Yet, also without the use of technology, experiential engagement of visitors with the past can be achieved. Seen in this light, 'authentic sites' hold the potential of achieving what may not be achieved elsewhere, such as the opportunity to study particular artifacts and to connect with people of the past in a way that may be difficult to replicate elsewhere (Hamber, Ševčenko & Naidu, 2010). Schramm (2011) articulates this point well, when arguing that "the memory of violence is not only embedded in peoples' bodies and minds but also inscribed onto space in all kinds of settings: memorials, religious shrines, border zones or the natural environment" (5). These sites thus hold an emotional connection to memory (Bickford 2014; Haider 2016; Hamber, Ševčenko and Naidu, 2010; Hodžić 2018) and are places where memory can be accessed (Buckley-Zistel & Schäfer 2014, 4). Hence, different authors have stressed the importance of space in memorialization and the fact that memorializations can draw much of their power from their location (Bickford 2014, 496). Not surprisingly, memorials are often erected at places where mass violence took place, examples being the Tuol Sleng Museum of Genocide in Cambodia, the Villa Grimaldi Peace Park in Chile and the Srebrenica-Potočari Memorial Center. The importance of being at the space where atrocities occurred then brings us back to contested spaces and war memorials.

Whereas memorialization in itself is focused on dealing with the past and envisioning a future in which atrocities should be 'never again', more often than not after genocide there is also a narrative that contests this and denies that genocide indeed took place. When such a narrative of denial is widespread and institutionalized, the element of resistance becomes increasingly important besides the need for memorialization. Hence, the perpetrator is at the time conspicuously absent and very much present during any memorialization. It is the question of how these two processes intersect which begs further inquiry. We argue that adopting a spatial lens makes it possible to discern how memorialization and resistance against denial narratives take place simultaneously and unfold in particular places, as we will explain further below.

Memorialization and Resistance through a Spatial Lens

An acknowledgement that the social world cannot be understood without accounting for spatial context, has become commonplace over the past two decades as various disciplines have increasingly incorporated space into their analyses (Warf & Arias 2008). This so-called 'spatial turn' (Soja 1989) has led to a wealth of insights into the many ways in which space shapes and guides human behavior and social life, as well as the ways in which spaces are in turn transformed

as a consequence. This builds on Lefebvre's (1991) understanding of social space, he argued that "social relations, which are concrete abstractions, have no real existence save in and through space. Their underpinning is spatial" (404). In turn, it can be said that space is socially constructed and hence is inherently ideological and political. Power is exercised in and through space, as those in power make claims to space and have the ability to determine the narratives that define its meaning. Research has therefore focused on the ways in which power shapes social space, but it also takes into account how these processes are challenged and resisted by the oppressed (Castells 1983; Guano 2003). It is for example not always clear who has a legitimate claim to a certain space, and notions on who has a claim to what may diverge. Interests in and perspectives on a certain space might collide (Björkdahl & Buckley-Zistel 2016, 5). Linking back to space in relation to the memorialization of genocide, we have seen above that there is a focus on the importance of location of memorials for their legitimacy and impact, as well as the key importance of resisting genocide denialism on the specific space where the atrocities took place.

Acknowledging the key importance that space occupies in our social realities, it becomes clear that developments in the aftermath of genocide also manifest in and through the post-genocide landscapes. Therefore, adopting a spatial lens enables us to discern complex processes and their intersections. The intersections between acts of memorialization and resistance against genocide denial may be difficult to observe by studying each in their own right. However, we argue that by looking at their enactment in and through space they become perceivable. In the analysis we explore exactly this in the context of the Marš Mira, understood as a commemoration of the Srebrenica genocide. We begin the analytical part of this paper with an introduction to the context.

The Srebrenica genocide: memorialization and denial

Under the command of General Ratko Mladić, the Serbian army took control of the town of Srebrenica on the 11th of July, 1995: an event now referred to as the 'the fall of Srebrenica' (Hasanovic & Petrila 2021, 125; Naimark 2011, 4). Since 1993, the valley of Srebrenica has been a UN designated safe zone. A military battalion of the Protection Force (UNPROFOR) led by the Dutch ('Dutchbat'), was mandated to protect the approximately 36,000 Bosnian Muslim refugees residing there (ICTY 2015). In the days before the 'fall of Srebrenica' thousands of refugees had made their way to the UN Dutchbat's headquarters, located close to the small village of Potočari (Nuhanovic 1998). After the fall of Srebrenica, men and women who resided at the Potočari compound were separated with the help of the Dutchbat army. The women and young children were told to board buses taking them to Bosnian controlled area, and a large number of men who had made it to the compound were captured and later killed. It has been estimated that about

12,500 to 15,000 men and boys who sought safety in the valley of Srebrenica, tried to reach the safe zone in Nezuk by foot, a distance of approximately one hundred kilometers (van den Berg 2014, 106; Hasanovic & Petrila 2021). This journey became later known as the Death March, as the Serbian army killed more than 8,000 Bosnian Muslims in the weeks that followed (Halilovic 2016; Hasanovic 2019). Later on, this became known as the Srebrenica genocide.

In November 1995, the Dayton Accords, a US-brokered peace agreement between Bosnian Muslim President Alija Izetbegovic, Croatian President Franjo Tudjman and Serbian President Slobodan Milosevic, brought an end to the bloody Bosnian War (1992-1995) (Robinson & Pobrić 2005). Holbrook, a US diplomat, guided the peace talks that led to the final Dayton Accords, which established a new state consisting of two separate entities: roughly half of the territory was allocated to the Muslim/Croat Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (51%) and the other half to Republika Srpska (49%) (Mecklenburg & De Jonge 2005, 3). The north-east of the country, including the valley of Srebrenica, was allocated to Republika Srpska. After the war, those Bosnian Muslims who survived, largely moved to the many refugee camps in the Bosnian Federation. Only very few, mainly the elderly and poor, remained in Republika Srpska. The effects of the Srebrenica genocide hence became crystallized in the Dayton Peace Accords. In the words of Hasanovic & Petrila (2021, 26): “history is written by those with the most power”.

Over the last twenty-five years, a narrative of genocide denial has been deeply embedded into the Serb society. According to Green (2020, 9), Serb denialism can be divided largely into three separate tactics: first, despite the mounting forensic evidence, the numbers and identities of Srebrenica's victims keep being disputed. This is in line with the genocide denial tactic describe by Charny (1999; 2012), who argues that questioning and minimizing tactics is widely present. Second, deniers hold on to a theory of an international anti-Serb conspiracy, which is then used to undermine judgements and decisions made by international courts. Only three days after the inauguration of the former Serb president Mr. Tomislav Nikolić, contradicted the judgements of the ICTY and ICJ in an official statement that no genocide had taken place (Mulaj 2017, 138). In line with this, the last tactic Green (2020, 9) discerns refers to the “public and political figures promulgate historically counterfactual narratives in which the roles of victim and perpetrator in the Srebrenica genocide are completely reversed”. This in turn bolsters Serb nationalism, as discourses of Serb victimhood and Bosnian aggression are spread through institutions (as education) and popular culture (Ramet 2007, 44).

This denialism is also spatially visible, through the erection of a Serb memorial near Potočari (Mulaj 2017, 138). This sign of Serb collective memory centers on the violence committed by Bosnian Muslims against the Bosnian Serb community in the area and contests the

narrative that links this land to the Srebrenica genocide (Braun 2014). This memorial stands at odds with the Srebrenica-Potočari Memorial Center, which is located at the site where atrocities took place and is now both a burial ground for the victims of the genocide as well as a place of commemoration. In 2017, a museum opened right across the street, built inside the battery factory that served as the quarters of the UN battalion tasked with protecting the enclave of Srebrenica in 1995 (Hoondert & van den Berg 2020; PAX 2017). Braun (2014) consequently argues that the memorialization of the genocide in Srebrenica “tells a story of Bosnian Muslim victimhood and Serb aggression” (195) and has as such exacerbated friction between the two communities. This tension between Serbs and Bosnian Muslims in the area derives in part from contestations over space, as the two communities attach different memories and hence different meaning to the space in and around Srebrenica.

The predominantly Bosnian Serb space of Republika Srpska, is interrupted for a brief period of time each year (Wagner & Nettelfield 2014, 7), as Potočari serves as the location of the yearly commemoration of the genocide on July 11th and the destination point of the Marš Mira. The Marš Mira presents an interesting case study, because it interrupts Serb dominance in the area for a three-day period each year, as the area is filled with several thousand Bosnian Muslims.

Qualitative analysis: marching to remember and resist

In 2005, ten years after the Srebrenica Genocide, the Marš Mira (peace march) was first organized (Hoondert 2018). The march has been a yearly occurrence since then and takes place between the 8th and 10th of July. The march covers a route of approximately ninety kilometers, starting in the small town of Nezuk and ending at the Potočari Memorial Center. The route is a reverse trek of the death march that the refugees of Srebrenica walked in 1995, starting in the safe territory of Nezuk, that was controlled by the Bosnia and Herzegovina-army and ending at the site where the men and boys of Srebrenica started their flight from the Serb forces (Hasanovic & Petrila 2020; Wagner & Nettelfield 2014). The Marš Mira participants arrive to Potočari on July tenth, the day before the annual commemoration of the genocide that takes place at this same location.

The route of the Marš Mira must be understood as symbolic, as one cannot retrace the exact steps the men and boys took in 1995. Most of them spent weeks in the forests, some in small groups and others alone, hiding from Serb forces and avoiding main roads in order to avoid detection. Many places in the wider area are also still inaccessible due to the presence of landmines. The march nevertheless passes numerous sites that carry the memory of mass violence and killings. Among these are many mass graves, memorials for individual victims and

a fallen minaret of a destroyed mosque. 2019 was the first year that the march covered an additional part of the 'original route'. An area close to Potočari had previously been inaccessible due to landmines, but through the work of demining teams the area had finally been cleared out. The site that was now added to the Marš Mira was specifically significant, as it covered an area where more than one thousand Bosnian Muslims have been killed by the Serb forces.

The number of marchers varies per year; in 2010 there were approximately 7,000 participants (Wagner & Nettlefield 2014, 55), while in the previous years the amount has been estimated to be between 3,500 and 6,000 participants (Besic & Ozturk 2019; Ozturk 2018). The majority of Marš Mira-participants are Bosnian Muslims. They travel from across Bosnia and Herzegovina to participate, most of them joining organized groups from their municipalities. Another significant presence among the participants consists of Bosnians from the diaspora, now living in the USA, the Netherlands, Germany and so on. While many have a personal link to the Srebrenica genocide, because they or their family members lived through the genocide, this is certainly not the case for all. Finally, there is also a visible foreign presence among the marchers, made up of Turkish, Iranians and a minority of participants from elsewhere.⁷

This section is structured following the four main incentives for walking the Marš Mira. The main narratives of resistance and memorialization function as a red thread throughout those incentives. The analysis focuses specifically on the ways in which participants relate to the landscape and the spaces on which the Marš Mira takes place.

“You Are Not Forgotten, For As Long As We Live We Shall Walk”: Accessing the Memory of the Genocide⁸

"You are not forgotten, for as long as we live we shall walk". It was this sentence that Abdulah, one of the survivors of the Death March, shared on his Facebook page two weeks after the Marš Mira of 2019. With the text he posted a number of photos, depicting shoes and bags belonging to victims of the genocide, items that were found only that year. The social media post is a telling example of the important position the Marš Mira takes up in the memorialization of the genocide. For survivors like Abdulah, walking the Marš Mira is in part like reliving the original death march. Tarik, another survivor who was walking the Marš Mira for the twelfth time, articulated this feeling well. He said that a general feeling of horror returned to him while lying in his tent after the first

⁷ While this foreign presence certainly raises interesting questions about memorialization, it falls outside of the scope of this research. Wagner and Nettlefield (2014) do explore the wider regional and international interests at play in the memorialization of the Srebrenica genocide, they also provide a further discussion of the engagement and activism of diasporic Bosnians in Srebrenica.

⁸ The quotes used in the titles of these paragraphs are phrases either widely shared during the Marš Mira or spoken by organizers of the march.

day of walking the Marš Mira. While listening to the rain falling down on the canvas, he remembered the sound of bullets raining down. Reflecting on how he felt while participating in the march, he said: "It is always hard, the emotions always come back". Hence, Tarik also indicates how the march functions as a means to access memories of the genocide, as his memories are inscribed onto the locations he passes during the Marš Mira. We thus see the importance of being at the sites where atrocities occurred is evident, very much in line with what authors like Buckley-Zistel and Schäfer (2014) argue about accessing memory.

It is essential to move beyond the personal memories of the survivors of the Death March. As the literature on collective memory teaches, memory is not an individual affair. How the transfer of traumatic memories can work becomes clear when talking to family members of victims and survivors. Amar is an illustrative example. At thirty-five years old he travelled from the USA, where he had been living since 2002, to participate in the Marš Mira for the first time. His reason to walk the march was to see and feel what his father experienced while walking the death march in 1995. Amar's father survived the death march after getting hit by a grenade not far away from Potočari. He was left for dead, but eventually regained consciousness and miraculously made it to safe territory. Amar indicated that he was especially dreading passing the location where his father was hit by the grenade on the third day, yet it was also what he came for. By (re)visiting specific places of trauma, memory is thus not only relived by survivors but also by their family members as being there allows them to imagine the actual death march in an experiential manner.

We may extend this argument to the participants of the march who do not have a direct link to the Srebrenica genocide. While walking the Marš Mira as a (relative of a) survivor cannot be compared to the experience of walking it as an 'outsider', it is also clear that the outsider is decidedly more than an onlooker.⁹ Participants of the march are actively engaged in an immersive three-day process. They do not only hear about what happened during the genocide, but also visit the locations where the violence occurred and retrace the steps the victims took. The three days of continuous hiking and camping take a physical effort that is experienced as challenging by many participants. Moreover, the weather conditions and the path which is at times muddy and slippery, add an additional dimension to the effort participants need to put in to complete the march. As was articulated many times by a multitude of participants, walking the Marš Mira enables one to "feel just a little bit of what they felt in 1995". This experience culminates in the finish of the march. At the end of the third day, the marchers reach the cemetery of Potočari. They arrive on the evening before the much larger annual commemoration of the genocide held at

⁹ The term 'outsider' is, of course, problematic, but is used here to indicate anyone who has no personal- or family memories of the Srebrenica genocide.

Potočari, awaited by a large crowd consisting of widows and surviving family of genocide victims, friends and family of marchers, but also the media and the Bosnian army. It is a solemn affair, marchers walk in silence onto the cemetery and finish the march passing the circular monument containing the names of the genocide's victims.

Hence, we see how Abdulah's statement in fact moves beyond an individual meaning of him as a survivor of the genocide to a statement that includes a larger, collective memory of the death march. If we are to understand the three days of marching as a type of ritual, performing the march induces among participants an intimate understanding of the suffering and existential fear the victims experienced. This performative character of the march is key, because it enables the sharing of memories of the genocide beyond the individual and for participants - including those who have no personal- or family memories of the genocide - to develop an intimate and personal understanding of the Srebrenica genocide. This brings us very close to Landsberg's (2004) understanding of prosthetic memory. However, whereas Landsberg draws on the use of technology, here we see that *being there* where the atrocities happened is what enables the possibility of engaging with events of the past and empathizing with victims. It is noteworthy nonetheless that the Marš Mira also incorporates some museum-like elements; important events during the march are the different speeches that are held along the way and the documentaries that are screened in the camps. Moreover, locations along the route are marked by both signs and monuments.¹⁰ In this way, participants are taught about the locations and victims of mass graves, mass killings and other places of destruction throughout the three days. Hence, beyond the performative nature of the act of marching itself, marchers are also encompassed in an environment of learning about the genocide. It is not the individual suffering that is highlighted here, but the sheer number of victims and the memory of what has been done to the community as a whole. What is furthermore unmistakable, is that the landscape plays an essential role in the way the memories of the genocide are accessed and shared throughout the Marš Mira.

“Never Forget Srebrenica”: The Importance of Remembering

The second incentive for walking the Marš Mira is to contribute to the memorialization of the genocide and make sure that the genocide will not be forgotten. The message to “never forget Srebrenica” is shared widely during the march and is a key message that participants stress. It is, for example, repeated by the delegations from different parts of Bosnia and Herzegovina, who

¹⁰ There are a few permanent monuments to memorialize the Srebrenica genocide on the way, such as the fallen minaret (discussed further below) and small shrines for martyrs erected by family members, most information is however conveyed through signs that are erected during the Marš Mira and removed again after.

wear t-shirts that state their origin and the message that their area supports the victims of the genocide. Another often seen commodity are banners containing similar statements. Furthermore, the phrase is one of the main hashtags when sharing information on the Srebrenica genocide and the Marš Mira online. It is thus clear that the memorialization of the genocide is largely set within the never-again paradigm (Bickford & Sodaro 2010) and that there is an emphasis on learning from what happened in the past (Haider 2016). The participants move beyond merely accessing collective memory of the genocide, to considering its relevance for their current lives. Nevertheless, as we will discuss here, the second incentive does not merely build forth on the first, but is largely also dependent on it and derives its power from it.

Participants' understanding of and connection to what happened in 1995 develops throughout the three-day march, as they develop a 'prosthetic memory', to borrow Landsbergs term. This in turn also grounds the idea that the genocide must never be forgotten, because it must serve as a lesson for the future. That this is the case, is shown in the ways in which participants expressed why they felt it was important to participate in the Marš Mira. Take for example the often recurring argument that the new generation of Bosnians, who have grown up after the war, need to learn about the genocide. Davud, a man in his early sixties who himself walked the Marš Mira for the first time, stressed this point. He argued that the Bosnian youth, including his own children, know very little about what happened in Srebrenica. "It is important to do at least once in your life", he stated and said he encouraged his children to participate as well. Faruk, a sixteen year old who joined with a delegation from his high school in Sarajevo, said he was glad that his school sent him to participate. He explained: "Walking the Marš Mira means learning about Srebrenica and Bosnian history in a way that is not possible in the classroom and it is very important that we know our own history". Other participants commented specifically on their personal reflections throughout the three days. Lejla, for example, a 41-year old woman whose parents fled Tuzla during the war and who grew up in Germany, said that it was important to participate because it enabled her to imagine herself in the shoes of the victims. She also stressed that during the march "I spent a lot of time talking to myself, thinking about what happened here and what I would have done had I been in the situation". It is then clear how the statement "never forget" (and "never again") takes on a more personal and consequently more powerful meaning.

Such reflections may remain a "what if"-question for participants who did not live through the events themselves. Yet, for Bosnian Muslims who remember the civil war the reality that atrocities could again occur is still very much present. This is evident when talking to participants who remember the war and still live in Bosnia, especially when bringing up the absence of Bosnian

Serbs during the Marš Mira. In this context, Almina said: “only a very slight minority [of Bosnian Serbs] come to such events. Leading politicians in Serbia are denying the genocide. This is a clear message saying that we do not accept or respect your victims. This is hurting the victims and the survivors very much”. By referring to the lack of acknowledgement and involvement, Almina points out the extent to which relations between the two communities are still tense, other interviewees even directly indicated that a renewed outbreak of violence is not unthinkable. There is a clear difference here with incentives for memorialization of the Holocaust and the way the phrase “never again” is spoken in these instances. After the Holocaust the German government acknowledged guilt and Nazi perpetrators were convicted during the Nuremberg trials, “the most prominent trial in West-German post-war history” according to Romeike (2016, 18). Romeike also states that while the Nuremberg trials had many shortcomings and distorted what happened during the genocide, they nevertheless constituted a clear move towards engagement with the past and towards memorialization (Ibid.). The case of the Srebrenica genocide is inherently different, as no such move has occurred in the aftermath of the war and the denial of the genocide by (Bosnian) Serbs and the latent conflict between the groups are still very much present. This means that the message to ‘not forget’ is urgent to Bosnian Muslims. “Never forget Srebrenica” is hence not merely a lesson for an abstract future but is understood very much as a cautionary message for present-day Bosnian society. It is here that we see how memorialization and resistance intersect.

“We are still here”: Resistance to Serb genocide denial

As the Marš Mira passes through the landscape formerly lived in by the Bosnian Muslim community, participants do not only access their collective memory of the genocide but inevitably also remember and reflect on the time prior, when they lived their everyday lives on that very land. While some recounted happy memories, these memories are also inherently tied in with the fact that this life ceased to exist after the civil war, when the area became officially recognized as ‘Republika Srpska’ under the Dayton Accords. Hence, beyond the mass killing the genocide also represents the loss of homeland, as the Srebrenica genocide was part of a planned and systematic attempt by the Serbian forces to erase the Bosnian people from the land and its history. This is visible in the landscape, which looks significantly different than prior to the war. Most of the Bosnian architecture has been removed and the majority of the Bosnian Muslim population that fled the area has not returned. During the Marš Mira a clear counterweight is offered to this attempted erasure, as Bosnian Muslims resist the idea that they do not have a history or claim to the area and emphasize the statement: “we are still here”. This counter narrative to the dominant

Serb narrative stresses two elements: 1) the Bosnian Muslim heritage and history on the land which may not be forgotten, hence tying in with the first incentive, and 2) a more obvious resistance to (Bosnian) Serb denialism. By marching through the contested area, the Serb denial narrative that is dominant in the area among Bosnian Serb officials and much of the Bosnian Serb population, is resisted (see also: Wagner & Nettlefield 2014). This second element will be addressed first.

Over the course of the three-day march, different ways to counter the denial narrative have become visible. First of all, as the participants trace the steps of the victims of Death March in 1995, they pass through multiple Bosnian Muslim villages whose inhabitants have largely fled during the war. Remnants of destroyed houses are still standing, mostly from families who have never returned or do not have the means to rebuild their house. Walking through this area, increases the visibility of the remnants of the genocide, therewith making it difficult to deny the atrocities from having taken place. The urge to share the story during those specific days is also shared by Imran, a 39-year-old mechanic, who was forced to walk the Death March at the age of 15. Imran works as a Red Cross volunteer during the Marš Mira, and explains it is important to share what he referred to as the 'facts' of what really happened during the summer of 1995. While the factual information that Imran shares is only shared by him during the Marš Mira, there is a clear intention to transform dominant narratives by conveying factual information (Bilali et al 2019, 301). The physical space in which the three-day hike takes place is moreover an important mechanism in the countering of the prevailing denial narrative. In line with this, Nadja explains she participates in the Marš Mira because she wants "to make sure that people [Nadja here refers to Bosnian Serbs] in Republika Srpska are aware of what has happened in Srebrenica in 1995". To do so, it is crucial to convey this message in the area where denialism is most prevalent and to hence resist this dominant narrative under the "noses of the oppressor" Pile and Keith (2009, 1). Another way in which this narrative is resisted, is through the marking places along the route of the Marš Mira where the atrocities took place. As noted above, mass graves and places where other gross atrocities took place are marked along the three-day route. On the second day, the route passes by a mosque that has been purposely destroyed during the war. While it has been rebuilt over time, the remnants of the original building (among others the fallen minaret) have been left in the garden of the mosque. Tarik, who we interviewed in the mosques' courtyard, explained that "it was an important decision to leave the minaret here, to show what they have done". The Marš Mira has an important function, as, in the words of Ahmed, it is a way to "share the stories, to make sure we are not forgotten". When applying the spatial lens, these practices of memorialization become understood in a different manner. It is through being present in the

area where the genocide took place, that sharing the stories counters the dominant narrative of (Bosnian) Serb denialism. In other words, memorialization practices become intertwined with the resistance to genocide denialism.

In 2019, the route also passed through an area that was only recently demined. Through the hard work of demining it became possible to walk a route that passes through a site where over a thousand people were killed. The demining of the area is an act of taking back land that was made inaccessible during the war, and the addition of this area to the route of the Marš Mira was an important reason for many to participate that year. Alongside the road, clothing, shoes and luggage of the victims that have been found during the demining activities were presented to display the genocide as an undeniable fact to the marchers. It is through the few remainders that are left are there to bear witness, that a claim to victimhood is made linked to the specific place (Wagner & Nettelfield 2014, 55). In doing so, the existing denial narrative is moreover challenged. That such attempts at resistance remain difficult, is shown in a second reason often provided for walking the new route: it avoids a village inhabited merely by Bosnian Serbs. Various participants explained to feel safer not to pass through it, as tensions between the two groups are heightened during the three days of the Marš Mira. Stories were for example shared of harassment by the Bosnian Serb population in regard to the commemoration of the genocide. These stories also indicate that while the march seeks to counter the Serb narrative, simultaneously confrontation is avoided and the collective memory of the Bosnian Muslim community is highly contentious in the area.

Lastly, an everyday form of resistance to the denial narrative is performed by those who have remained behind, or who return to the area. Their presence is not simply symbolic, but rather a daily reality. During the Marš Mira, all the villages that the march passes through become crowded with locals offering food, drinks and general support. Ahmed and Ema, a local couple in their late sixties, opened their house for the participants of the march. During a home cooked lunch, they recall being forced to flee their house in early 1993. Despite being one of the few from the area who came back, they did feel the urge to return to what was *their* home ground, and which had been in the family for generations. Upon returning in 2000, the house was destroyed and had to be rebuilt from the ground up. Living here is still not easy, the couple continues to experience discrimination due to their Bosnian Muslim heritage. Despite this, Ahmed and Ema are intent on staying in the area, and as such resist to accept this land as (Bosnian) Serb territory. In line with Rose's arguments (2002, 384), they should be understood as agents that respond to the dominant system. Those who have returned or remained moreover counter the denial narrative by sharing their stories, especially during the three day march. It is through the Marš

Mira, that they are supported in this resistance. Almina explains it is crucial to walk here as these “areas that are almost forgotten”, and it is through the Marš Mira and those who still live there, that the truth can be kept alive “we are retelling the story, what they had to go through”. The denial narrative, and the dominant claim to the land, are thus challenged during these three days through the ability to share the truth. On top of that, a message is conveyed that the area holds a rich Bosnian history, which portrays a second line of resistance: resisting the Serb claim to the land.

Alija is one of the people who return yearly to the Srebrenica valley during the Marš Mira. While he has resettled in Denmark after the war, his family still lives in their original family home. During the first stop of the march in an open space in the forest, Alija pours lemonade for the walkers. He explains that this is a very important day as it shows “that we are not going away, we are still here - still in this same area - and there is lots of support”. This expression supports the second line of analysis, namely the Bosnian counter-narrative that suggests that the Bosnian claim to this space is rightful, due to their long-standing Bosnian history in the area. Through claiming this contested space as ‘Bosnian’, the dominant cultural themes related to the place become a subject for debate (Lawrence-Zúñiga & Low’s 2007, 245). This debate is further supported by the use of symbols and historical references alongside the Marš Mira route referring to Bosnian heritage. Numerous flags of the old Bosnian Kingdom are carried during the three-day walk, indicating a presence of the Bosnian nation that dates back centuries. An interesting symbol in this regard is the Marš Mira participation badge. It depicts two children of Srebrenica, with behind them a medieval Bosnian tomb. The depiction of the tomb refers to the history of the Bosnian Kingdom, seen as evidence that a long Bosnian history on this land exists. These different examples show that marching through this terrain is an active attempt to resist the dominant structure and thus challenge prevailing power relations to produce new ones, as also argued by Björkdahl and Buckley-Zistel (2016, 7).

It is undeniable that the Marš Mira passes through highly contested terrain, as the majority of the Bosnian Serb population who live in the area, ascribe different meanings and memories to the space than Bosnian Muslims do. Through the act of reclaiming the land with thousands of Bosnian Muslims for three-days during the year, the collision between the two narratives and the asymmetrical power relations prevalent in the region become visible. This aligns with Björkdahl’s and Buckley-Zistel’s (2016, 4) argument on contested space. Beyond the memory of the grave atrocities of 1995, injustices to Bosnian Muslims in the Srebrenica area however continue to occur until today, and the few who remain in the area are discriminated against under the Republika Srpska government. Through asserting their claim on the land through the Marš Mira, Bosnian Muslims do not only remember, but also affirm their own narrative: Bosnian history lies here, they

belong here. In this claim to land, the memorialization incentives to ‘never forget’ and to remember the victims by walking, thus become mutually reinforced by the message that “we are still here” that the Bosnian Muslim community conveys by walking through the area. While these three incentives are often recognized as such by the participants, the final incentive of obtaining justice is not acknowledged overtly by all participants.

“At least 1,000 were killed here”: Marching in the Pursuit of Legal Justice

Part of the denial narrative of the Bosnian Serb community, is the refusal to accept the judgements made by the ICTY, or the ICJ. In 2017, the ICTY restated the judgement that the atrocities that took place in Srebrenica, constitute a genocide (ICTY 2017). The Court moreover sentenced 45 people for crimes in relation to the Srebrenica genocide (Rovcanin 2018). Despite this, Republika Srpska and the Serbian regime continues to deny that the mass killings were genocide (Ibid). In response, the Marš Mira, according to their website, “aims to animate all relevant actors, locally and internationally, to speed up the arrest and prosecution of those responsible for the crimes committed, in order to satisfy justice as a precondition for building lasting peace and tolerance among peoples in Bosnia and Herzegovina” (Marš Mira 2021). The objective was also addressed on the last day of the march; in an open space in the forest on a hillside situated in the recently demined area, a podium was set up by the organization. During a break, when a large part of the participants gathered, three emotional speeches were given by survivors of the death march who clearly articulated the importance of obtaining justice (Wagner & Nettlefield 2014, 53). The organizer who introduced them, explained in his speech that “the Hague inspectors have found 650 bodies in this place, but at least 1.000 were killed here”. This brings us to the fourth incentive to participate in the Marš Mira; to get the attention of and to call to action institutions with the authority to bring justice to the victims of the genocide and the Bosnian community as a whole.

Despite the emphasis put on this incentive by the organization of the march, this objective was not shared among most Marš Mira participants. In fact, throughout the interviews held during the three days, none of the interviewees indicated ‘obtaining justice’ to be an incentive for walking. Confronted with questions about this objective, some interviewees even responded dismissively, with one of them suggesting that this may be written by someone with no knowledge of the matter. Almina argued that “Justice is in the court. This is not the area to ask for justice”. Nonetheless, pursuing justice remains an important part of the march. It is precisely the large gathering in this particular space that draws international attention and as such the organization succeeds in conveying the message of pursuing justice. This observation was acknowledged when directly asking if the quest for justice could play a role while walking the Marš Mira. Abdulah stated, for

example, “by spreading the messages that we are all here and we all won’t forget, by the act of standing up together, we inherently push the justice system [to continue its work on the Srebrenica genocide].”.

It is interesting then to note that for the majority of participants, the emphasis of the Marš Mira lays on the act of memorialization and resistance of the denial narrative even though the organization of the march has a different goal in mind. On the other hand, linking back to incentive two, what was stressed as important was to share and develop an intimate understanding of the fact that a repetition of a genocide must be avoided at all costs. Many participants then do not regard the march as a space to fight for justice, but this does not mean that an understanding that there is a need for justice is absent. Furthermore, it is also relevant to link back once more to the notion of prosthetic memory (Landsberg 2004). For participants, the three days of walking was also a process of learning about and reflecting on the genocide, a process which takes time to unfold. In line with this, we may expect that through participation in the Marš Mira a participants’ activism is incited whereby besides resistance to the denial narrative, a quest for justice becomes shared by a larger part of the participants. It finally brings us back to the statement from Abdulah: “You are not forgotten, for as long as we live we shall walk”. While interpreted above to concern memorialization of the victims of the genocide, it also holds a certain combative quality within itself. Abdulah indicates that he will not rest and will continue to strive for justice for the victims. It demonstrates once more memorialization and resistance are intertwined, and often reinforce each other throughout the Marš Mira.

Conclusion

The findings of this research should be placed in the larger context of post-genocide peacebuilding, whereby denialism is understood as a serious barrier to reconciliation (Altanian 2017; Bilali 2019, 288; Green 2020, 8). It becomes clear during the Marš Mira that genocide denial prevents the victims, and the society as a whole, to move past the atrocities that took place (Balili 2019; COE 2020; Cohen 2001; Stanton 1998). As has become clear in existing literature, there are various attempts to counter genocide denial, but so far, mostly top-down (Bilali et al. 2019, 301) and institutional attempts (Green 2020) have been researched. The Marš Mira has however proven an interesting case study to understand in which way locally embedded acts of resistance take place.

Through analyzing the march through a spatial lens, insights were provided on how resistance and memorialization happen simultaneously and in what ways they strengthen each other. We observed that the marchers of the Marš Mira tie a collective memory to the landscape;

they visualize in the landscape the envelopment of the genocide by sharing memories of 1995 and indicating important locations with signifiers, like placing signs and belongings of victims along the route. In these ways they lay a claim to the space on which the Marš Mira unfolds. The performative character of the march reinforces the ways in which participants can imagine and empathize with the victims of the genocide, being there and walking the route that victims took in 1995 has the potential to inspire activism for social change. As a result, the objective of the Marš Mira organization to obtain legal justice is shared with the marchers during the Marš Mira.

During the three day march, Bosnian Muslims thus performatively act out their collective memory on the landscape in and around Srebrenica. The narrative of genocide denial is however the dominant throughout the rest of the year and collides with participants wishes to commemorate and honor the victims. As such, we argue that the presence of the four incentives for walking the Marš Mira should be understood as an indication of the unresolved conflict stressors. As long as there is no genocide acknowledgement from the government of Republika Srpska, or the Serbian government, memorialization practices will remain intertwined with resistance and at the forefront of how the Bosnian Muslim community deals with the history of genocide. These conclusions indicate the complexity of the current situation in Bosnian post-genocide society and the challenges that reconciliation between the Bosnian Muslim and Bosnian Serb communities still holds. Beyond the contribution to the academic debate, these insights also provide valuable insights for peacebuilding practitioners, as it indicates the importance of looking thoroughly at local memorialization practices and considering the essential role that 'authentic space' plays to the community when dealing with the past.

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