
Symposium of the SOG Scientific Advisory Board

30 Years after the Beginning of the War in Bosnia and Herzegovina – What Does It Mean to Rely on the Young Generation?

Organization: Southeast Europe Association (Südosteuropa-Gesellschaft / SOG) / Scientific Advisory Board, moderation: Dr. Heike Karge
Hybrid event: Berlin and per Zoom, 25 February 2022

Report by Manuela Brenner, Regensburg

In her opening remarks, moderator Dr. *Heike Karge* shared her thoughts on the importance of focusing on the young generation in future discussion and research. She quoted the new High Representative for Bosnia and Herzegovina, *Christian Schmidt*, who, a few days prior to taking office at the end of July 2021, appealed to the public to “put the focus on the young generation [in Bosnia and Herzegovina], the EU, the High Representative and everyone together. Because relying only on the graying gentlemen will not be enough. I bet on the young generation!”. While the aforementioned generation did experience the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina as children, or not at all, it nevertheless carries the burden of the war and its long-lasting effects in a country that is still politically and ethnically divided, said Karge.

The speakers invited to the symposium belong to this generation. They are distinctive in their individual biographies, but also in their private, social, political and/or academic commitment to a democratic, open and pluralistic Bosnia-Herzegovinian society. The symposium, which aimed to bring representatives of this particular focus group as well as those with family roots in the country into conversation with each

other and with the audience in attendance and online, was guided by the following questions: What opportunities are associated with the work of this generation, which was not actively involved in the war? What support does it need at home and abroad to realize its own hopes and the expectations of the international community? What can we do to support this process and strengthen the young generation in its commitment?

The inspiration for the design of the symposium stemmed from three considerations. First, *Heike Karge* pointed to some of the political conditions under which people in Bosnia and Herzegovina live as well as what many political observers refer to as a “negative peace”. For example, the secession efforts of the Republika Srpska (RS) political leadership are a cause for great concern, and the application process of EU membership, for which Bosnia applied in 2016, is being hindered rather than actually making progress. “So, if the political elite of the country rather aims to maintain the current power structures, to maintain the negative peace, then we should turn our attention to those people and groups who are committed to a more open, less ethnically centred, pluralistic

and democratic Bosnia and Herzegovina, professionally, civically or artistically, in the more than 25 years of long post-war period in Bosnia and Herzegovina", concluded Heike Karge.

Second, the speakers are not in control of the levers of political power but are all somehow politically active and trying to create new impulses, raise questions and challenge old discourses. The difference between them and those who dominate politics in the country is that they are not looking through the ethnonationalist lens and are therefore exposed to criticism from their own or other ethnic groups and the political public within Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Third, the speakers are all academically trained, their degrees ranging from a BA in German literature or dramaturgy, a Master's in Slavic languages to a MA in history or human rights, or they are currently pursuing a PhD. They are highly educated and qualified and either academically, socially or artistically, but always politically active in the public space. As a member of the Scientific Advisory Board of the SOG, Karge said she would like to further strengthen and promote dialogue and cooperation between the Southeast Europe Association and academia, politics, civil society and the arts in the Southeast European region, in this case Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Dino Dupanović provided insights into the re-appraisal of the genocide in Srebrenica in 1995. The massacre as a topic in the culture of memory, in various manifestations of historiography, in the media, in memory, and in other fields is often emotional for some, provocative for others. Srebrenica and how it is perceived makes clear that it is categorized as *us vs. them* in historiography, public opinion, and everyday life. These form the bases for narratives including stories about genocide, counter-genocide and its denial, especially for the political elite of Serbia and the RS. Metaphors play a key role in these competing narratives, and some of these mantras, Dupanović argues, are used even when they come from controversial authors who do not argue for their cause. Domestic historians, political scientists, anthropologists and others are influenced by the environment which they live in and public opinion there and are

still engaging in a historical process that is not yet complete.

Dupanović added that memory has gained great importance in culture, increasingly being identified with ethnic obligations. An example of this is the Garanice Memorial Park, which is on the cover of the invitation to the symposium, a memorial created by Bogdan Bogdanović and dedicated to the victims of fascism. The site was used by politicians even before the war in the 1990s and is still used by the Serbian political elite on various occasions as a platform for speeches that sound frighteningly similar to those of the past that contributed to the 1992–95 war. These observations in the field of memory studies may not be new, but what is different from the past is that there is a new generation that is challenging this memory culture, as Karge pointed out.

Ajna Jusić spoke about her goal of giving a voice of support to children born of wartime rape. They, and she herself is one of them, lack legal and social recognition. Discrimination, stigmatization, judgement, political disregard, statelessness, homelessness, physical violence and emotional abuse are just some of the difficulties those like Jusić face. Because their mothers are aware of the problems, they very often try to hide the rape or the identity of the biological fathers, which makes it even more difficult to identify them. One of the criticisms of the speaker is the fact that her biological father is still walking as a free man and the silence on this issue makes everyone share the blame.

Jusić is calling for the intergenerational impact of sexual violence interwoven with the conflict to be urgently recognized and addressed, not only on the national, but also on the international level. National and global communities must be aware of the taboos and complexities surrounding victims of violence and address the concept of forced motherhood due to rape during war. Currently, mothers suffer from a lack of support on a physical, psychological, social and economical level, which in turn is passed on to the next generation. There has been some progress in the recognition process, as the associations "Forgotten Children of War" and "medica mondiale" in Germany have drafted a successful

proposal for legal recognition of children born of war rape, which now needs to be addressed by decision-makers in Bosnia and Herzegovina. This would be an important step towards ending the stigmatization of mothers and their children, which is an important contribution to reconciliation and transitional justice.

In giving a first-hand insight into such a sensitive topic, *Ajna Jusić* was able to contribute even more to the symposium by concluding her presentation with a strong appeal: "Let's be a society of equals and not a society of different labels. Let us build bridges of peace, solidarity, empathy, support, but before everything let us build bridges of humanity because this is the only way we can endure and be a healthier society and, in that way, we can create a better society for the future generation."

Nataša Govedarica based her presentation on her master's thesis, but also drew on the experience and practice of activists in Bosnia and Serbia in various organizations. She strongly believes that since conflicts in the Yugoslav region are regionally different, coming to terms with the past must also be approached regionally, and furthermore, the foundation for a positive peace must be laid on a bilateral and multilateral level. Even if their generation is not responsible for the crimes committed during the war, they can be held responsible for their attitude towards these crimes.

On the question of what can be done to improve activities by human rights organizations and other nongovernmental organizations in the region, *Govedarica* noted that traditional activities seem to appeal only to like-minded people. To reach a broader audience, other measures must be taken. She turns to art and culture as conveyors of various messages, as they can contribute to dealing with the past and promoting and protecting human rights. Art in various forms, such as films, documentaries, photography and installations have the power to break through indifference and spark public debate. These forms appeal to audiences on an emotional rather than a rational level. Although quite many negative examples in the case of propaganda could be cited, the speaker pointed out the positive impact films can have on societies by breaking

down prejudices and stereotypes. The screening of documentaries or feature films such as "A Cry from the Grave" (1999) or "Quo Vadis, Aida?" (2021) elicit reactions, stimulate discussions, and in some cases even end the silence that previously prevailed. Thus, as she works toward great social change in society, art is an important strategy for *Govedarica*.

Emina Haye and *Thomas Schad* presented their project "Bosnia in Berlin" which has so far resulted in a book project and a blog. The initiators of the project took part in a panel discussion on how the events of the war continue to shape and determine personal lives, personal decisions, and academic careers 25 years later. The participants, women from Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, and Germany shared their very personal stories and talked about their lives before the war, their war experiences, their lives in the diaspora, their individual engagement, et cetera. These women, who had witnessed the war firsthand or indirectly, received encouragement with their authentic stories, which eventually led to the genesis of the idea to write a book. According to Haye, the contributions are from a wide range of backgrounds: Linguists, artists, writers, and scholars. The book does not exclusively focus on Srebrenica, but on Bosnia and Herzegovina in general and how personal migration stories can become part of a larger migration history.

Schad provocatively challenged the frame of the symposium, namely to trust in the power of youth as bearers of hope and a better future. In doing so, he hoped to demonstrate that literature and culture deserve attention and support. More than 20 years ago, when he was working in Bosnia and Herzegovina, he organized a youth conference which was attended by the then High Representative Wolfgang Petritsch. In his speech, he emphasized youth as the future of the country, just as Christian Schmid, who holds that office today, still does. *Schad* questions where this highlighted empowerment of youth has led, pointing in particular to one of the main problems of this generation: the massive immigration of young people.

Schad is concerned about leaving the future entirely up to the youth because there are

other issues, such as climate change, that need to be addressed now and by all of us, not just one generation. Moreover, literature and academia are interconnected as a task of truth-seeking. Literature can act as an incubator for science, but it is also often needed to tell a truth that is too fresh to be told in a non-narrative, non-fictional, and non-literary form, for example, when the protagonists are still alive and naming them could be painful or even dangerous. Literature is also an important field for truth-seeking and scholarship because it allows stories to be explored, contextualized, and constructed, but also deconstructed and fragmented. Stressing that the youth is a complex semantic entity deserves critical evaluation from time to time, lest it become a fixed frame of discourse that no one is allowed to touch and question.

Heike Karge noted the fresh and unusual perspectives of the panelists compared to the country's public mainstream and raised the question of whether it was only their age that allowed them to look at the (war) past differently or whether society had evolved. In addition, questions and comments related to why Srebrenica continues to be the focus of studies and conversations that point to other where atrocities were committed during the war, and whether post-war societies simply need to learn to live with different views and conflicting narratives as they seem to remain, were raised and discussed. Karge concluded by noting that many questions remain unanswered, but she stressed the importance of continually asking these questions, discussing them, and connecting with those willing to share, which the symposium was successful in doing.

Abschied und Neubeginn bei der SOG Mitglieder- und Jahreshauptversammlung der Südosteuropa-Gesellschaft 2022

Hybride Veranstaltungen in Berlin und via Zoom, 25. und 26. Februar 2022

Bericht von Wladimir Dirksen, München

Die Mitglieder- und Jahreshauptversammlung der Südosteuropa-Gesellschaft im Leonardo Royal Hotel in Berlin stand 2022 im Zeichen des Abschieds von Dr. *Hansjörg Brey*, des langjährigen Geschäftsführers und Chefredakteurs der Zeitschrift Südosteuropa Mitteilungen, aus dem Amt des Geschäftsführers. Verabschiedet wurde auch Alina Staniek, die nach vielen Jahren als Buchhalterin der SOG ebenfalls in den Ruhestand tritt. Die Veranstaltung fand in hybrider Form statt und wurde für alle Zuschauer, die aufgrund der pandemischen Lage nicht persönlich teilnehmen konnten, live per Zoom übertragen.

Mitgliederversammlung am 25. Februar 2022

Zu Beginn seines **Rechenschaftsberichts** machte Präsident Manuel Sarrazin darauf aufmerksam, dass von den besonderen gesetzlichen Möglichkeiten im Rahmen der Covid-19-Pandemie Gebrauch gemacht werde. Die Mitglieder-

versammlung finde daher mit nur begrenzter Anwesenheit statt, die Ausübung der Mitgliedschaftsrechte werde aber allen Mitgliedern im Wege der elektronischen Kommunikation über das genutzte Online-Tool Polyas für die Gremienwahlen möglich sein. Sodann äußerte sich Präsident Sarrazin aus gegebenem Anlass zum russischen Angriffskrieg auf die Ukraine und unterstrich angesichts der jüngsten Entwicklungen die zentrale Bedeutung von Zusammenhalt in Gesellschaften und internationalen Institutionen wie EU und NATO. Sarrazin erwähnte außerdem seine unmittelbar bevorstehende offizielle Ernennung zum Sondergesandten der Bundesregierung für die Staaten des westlichen Balkans.

Aufgrund des bevorstehenden Personalwechsels in der Geschäftsstelle stellten sich auf Bitte von Präsident Sarrazin der designierte Geschäftsführer Dr. *Christian Hagemann* sowie