

Free book review on genocide and individual collective responsibility

[Experience](#), [Responsibility](#)



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Introduction

In the history of genocide crimes, the question of responsibility always crops up. International organizations of justice have always argued that responsibility for genocide and war crimes is a collective and individual responsibility. Everyone is responsible in their own right but also it is the duty of the society as a whole to work against forces that would otherwise promote occurrence of war atrocities. This paper is a comparative piece drawing evidences and incidents between the works of Slavenka Drakulic in the book “ They Would Never Hurt A Fly: War Criminals on Trial in the Hague” and Heda Margolius Kovaly works in the book “ Under a Cruel Star: A Life in Prague 1941-1968 Study”. The purpose is to analyze the similarities and differences between two pieces of work in relation to how each of the works provides an insight about genocide and responsibility for the same. “ They Would Never Hurt A Fly: War Criminals on Trial in The Hague” is an analysis of the crimes of the former Yugoslavia state and the incidents of seeking for justice for the victims later in The Hague. On her part, Kovaly in

her book "Under a Cruel Star: A Life in Prague 1941-1968 Study" provides personal accounts of the Nazi regime in Germany the atrocities in the former Yugoslavia.

Similarities

In each of these accounts, the perpetrators seem to be hated on the international scene but are revered most in their nations and others that border them. The world view them as sole perpetrators and most responsible for the crimes in their countries. Drakulic in her recounts states that "once these people are arraigned in the wheels of justice, there seems to be conflicting positions between the international community and the citizens of the affected nation" (36). She says that the court sessions are not only boring but attempts to seek justice are turned into spectator venues where suspects are cheered while witnesses are subjected to terror and victimization. Drakulic recounts of one witness, Milan Lecvar who was blown up in her mother's yard for showing the brave face of acting as a witness against the said perpetrators of the Yugoslavian war. On her part, Kovaly explains the traumatic encounters she and other Jewish natives had to go through during the regime. She recounts that even after moving to the Czechoslovakia state, things were not any better. The leaders were the ultimate references of action by the citizenry.

The amount of influence the perpetrators wielded was immense and unimaginable. They ruled people's minds even across states. Both writers seem to question whether people in their rightful minds would allow to be influenced into crime by only a few persons whom they look up to as their

leaders. The Nazi Regime according to Kovaly was the overall monument of power to people. The leaders meant everything. Similarly in Yugoslavia, people like Radomir Kovac and Slobodan Milosevic had so much authority. Through this authority they were able to galvanize masses to commit crimes of torture, rape, murder and mass killings. It therefore means that while the leaders of these regimes were responsible in mobilizing the masses, individual citizens were directly responsible for the crimes. It is the common citizens who raped women, tortured and killed others. The leaders at the top of the hierarchy were there to give orders and were deemed absolute in their authority. Sloboden and the likes were the absolute rulers in Yugoslavia while the Nazi's regime had rules that were absolute and sometimes impossible to follow as Kovaly argues.

The people who were politically responsible for the genocides were not in any way extraordinary. It is the acceptance and worship of their ideologies by the masses that elevated them to become iconic to their followers.

Drakuli does rhetorically question whether these people were "ordinary people like you and me or monsters" (Dracula, pg 6). In her conclusion she says that seeing them in person one would never imagine such ordinary people would be held accountable for the crimes in their countries. Kovalic on the other hand reflects on how individual characters were quite different in nature from the actions they performed. She talks of a Nazi guard, Franz who acted at times as the executioner but was so ordinary in nature. From her memories, she reflects upon Franz and how he protected a young and frail inmate named Eva while showing fatherly concern to her (Kovalic, pg 30). It therefore brings to the fore that atrocities were committed under the

guise of political leadership but individuals were almost solely responsible. The society shaped them to what they became and how they acted.

Differences

In the last chapter, Brotherhood and Unity, Drakulic reflects on the experiences and personalities of individuals on trial at The Hague and how they transform to live in harmony with each other after the war. Drakulic brings to the fore the moderately good lives in detention of these people and comparing to the victims who remain haunted by the effects of the detainees torturous deeds. Drakulic takes us through an account of Milosevic and how he integrated into life in prison after previously feeling isolated. It did not begin easy for him though as he confronts Goran Jelisic who slaps him on the first day. With time he gained popularity within the group and even began teaching some inmates English. The lives of the victims on the other hand, remained embroidered in pain and haunting memories. In Yugoslavia, Drakulic laments that people could not come to terms to be able to seal the boundaries that caused war and animosity remained in the air. In the detention units however, the boundaries that existed between the detainees during the war were completely sealed. Drakulic perhaps uses this comparison to show how individual responsibility could be enhanced by circumstances to solve a societal problem and how they negatively impact a society.

Kovaly draws towards the end by describing the growing preference for communism within Czechoslovakia. Individual defiance shown by Kovalic and her husband's later prominent role in the government after are a reflection

of the kind of role an individual can play to solve during warring times.

According to Kovalic, "Defiance is the best way to show individual responsibility" (46). It helps when other members of the society adopt the similar forms of defiance against the ruling elite.

While Kovalic reflects upon individuals during the times when crimes were being committed, Drakulic focuses on the leadership at the time they are on trial. Drakulic says she expected to see range persons very different from ordinary individuals. She puts it "But what did I expect to see? Horns? Pointed ears? After all, they were all just ordinary policemen" (Drakulic, pg. 19) For Drakulic she spent just five months analyzing the characters from the court premises. Drakulic to conclude that the society had a role to play that it neglected since by the look and analysis of those held responsible at the trials, it seemed they were ordinary people who were influenced in part by the society.

On the other hand, Kovalic relies on personal experiences to draw conclusions about individual and collective responsibility in relation to the crimes. She was born in war torn town of Prague. She gives chronological order of events as to the events during the war and how she and other people were subjected to suffering. She recounts of the way the state took control of the media and the economy began to enter into a position of decline. According to her, "Responsibility on a higher scale lay on the authorities and to a lesser degree on the citizenry and every person seemed to conform to the rules without questioning". To Kovalic, the society is to blame for neglecting its values and letting individuals erode them with their ideologies.

Conclusion

The events described in these two works provide a reflection of the responsibilities held by each person during the genocide, every person had a role to play in enhancing the criminality maybe with the exception of the targeted groups and victims. Kovalic's chronological analysis gives us an account of the situation on the ground and shows how duties and responsibilities were shared. Drakulic on her part offers us the opportunity to reflect on the persons deemed most responsible and how they are turned into villains or heroes when brought to book. They both provide a link to the responsibility each person holds in the event of crimes such as genocide no matter the social statue of that person.

Works Cited

Drakulić, Slavenka. *They Would Never Hurt a Fly: War Criminals on Trial in the Hague*. New York: Viking, 2004. Print.

Kovály, Heda. *Under a Cruel Star: A Life in Prague 1941-1968*. London: Granta, 2012. Print.