

Bosnia genocide essay



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We've all heard of the Holocaust. We've read about the mass murder of 800,000 civilians in Rwanda. People write books, make movies, hold memorial services, and advocate awareness of these terrible genocides. While it would be nice to say that those were the only genocides our world has experienced, there are countless others that are rarely mentioned. The Bosnian genocide took place between 1992 and 1995, around the time my generation was beginning. It was a result of the war between Bosnia and the Serbians (and a number of Croatians).

In 1946, Yugoslavia was divided into six federated republics: Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia, and Slovenia. Bosnia passed a referendum for independence that was supported by the country's Muslims and Croats, but rejected by representatives of the Serb population, who established their own republic, Republika Srpska. Following Bosnia's declaration of independence, Bosnian Serb forces (supported by the Serbian government), accompanied by the Yugoslav's People's Army, declared war on Bosnia so they could take the land for themselves.

Although Croatia had first supported Bosnian independence, their president, Franjo Tudman, decided to join the war to secure land for his republic. Along with this came an "ethnic cleansing" of the Muslims in Bosnia, who represented almost half the population. This genocide wiped out 66.2 percent of the Bosniaks, or Bosnian Muslims, in the country, according to the International Committee of the Red Cross.

On October 13, 1991, on the eve of war, the future president of Republika Srpska, Radovan Karadzic, expressed his view about the future of Bosnia and

Bosnian Muslims: " In just a couple of days, Sarajevo will be gone and there will be five hundred thousand dead, in one month Muslims will be annihilated in Bosnia and Herzegovina. " There were no Bosnian forces to fight back, and because they had been left defenseless, the country ultimately ceased to exist. Bosnian Muslims and many non-Serbs were forced out of their homes, and women and children were sent to unhygienic detention centers or places known as rape camps. " Zehra Smajlovic, a witness for the International Court of Justice and a Bosniak survivor, stated that nearly two dozen women disappeared when Bosnian Serbs came to the center where she was being held. " They raped one woman whose children and parents were present, along with everyone else," testified Alija Lujinovic, another survivor.

According to the Red Cross, over two million people were displaced from their homes during the Bosnian War, and 200, 000 people died, including 12, 000 children. Fifty thousand women were raped, tortured, sold, or killed. Men were sent to concentration camps.

Osman Talic was a survivor of not one, but four camps. He was a witness for the International Court where he attested to the torture he endured. I was fortunate to be able to talk to Osman Talic. His English is not perfect, and he searches for words, smiling after each sentence and saying " You understand? " " I lived in a small town called Sanski Mos in Bosnia," he told me. " After the breakup of Yugoslavia, there was fighting and anger between the Croats, Serbs, and Muslims. In my town, I was the leader (with a few others) of the SDA, an organization that represented the Bosnian Muslims.

In 1991, there was the first election in Bosnia. Since Muslims made up so much of the population, many of those elected were Muslim. The Bosnian

Serbs were very angry that the Serbians had become a minority. The Serbs decided to declare war and get rid of the Muslims. They had help from Croatia, and the manpower to destroy us. The Bosnians had no weapons or outside help. We were barricaded inside Bosnia. “ On May 26, 1992, Serbian soldiers came to my town and forced me and other men out of our homes. My daughters were 15; my son was 18 and had joined the Bosnian army. My wife had died.

My sister took my daughters to Slovenia to safety. I was taken to a concentration camp called Betonirka. I spent two months there while Bosnian men came pouring in from all over. “ The last day in that camp was July 25, 1992. That day my name was called from a list of men who had been businessmen or leaders of some organization, and we were put in buses. During the trip, the other bus stopped. The men came out and the Serbian guards, who had long knives, slit their throats. One by one they fell at the side of the road. There was no reason. They acted like it was no big deal to take a life. My bus arrived at the jail later that day. This method of randomly slaughtering innocent men was very common during the genocide. The soldiers would pile the bodies on top of sewage drains to get rid of the blood, almost as if to eradicate the evidence of their horrible deeds. He continues: “ At the jail the guards questioned me every day, asking how many weapons I had and what political positions I had held in Sanski Most. If I refused to answer, I would be beaten. They took my clothes, documents, everything. I was put in a room the size of a small garage with 70 other detainees with no windows so there was no way to tell if it was day or night. We were beaten every day and given very little food. Every day the guards would bring a loaf

of bread for 24 of us to share. We would get one small glass of water for two. Before the war, I was 220 pounds. A few months later, I weighed 130. “ I would think each morning, Today might be my last day. Sometimes I would wake up at night with a gun to my head. For some reason, once I woke up, the soldier would decide not to kill me. “ The guards would place my hands on a cooker and put a knife to my neck. I was told that if I lifted my hands, the guards would slit my throat. My hands were burnt so badly I still have no feeling in my fingers.

I slept on a slab of concrete for two years and not allowed to shower for seven months. During this time, I was allowed no contact with the outside. “ Then, on August 28, 1992, I was taken to a third concentration camp called Manjaca. This was one of the biggest, with 7, 000 to 8, 000 people. Here I was not scared. There were so many people, I knew that the soldiers could not hurt all of us. We were sent to do menial labor every day. I remember, once I dropped a hammer on the head of a Serbian guard. I thought, Now they will kill me. But although I was punished, I still had my life. “ The lack of food was still a huge problem.

I gave my food to anyone who was sick or younger. When we went out to work, we would we would eat grass and dirt. If we were lucky we found a frog or bugs to eat. The Red Cross came with food, clothes, and supplies. I did not understand why no one was trying to free us. “ In December 1992, everyone was released and allowed to flee to Croatia and Slovenia. I thought I would finally see my family, but instead I and 221 other men were taken to a fourth concentration camp called Batkovici where I spent a year. I was not killed because of my position in the SDA; the Serbs still wanted information.

The men who were not as lucky were ordered to dig trenches. They did not know the trenches also served as their graves. When they finished, the guards would slit their throats. " On the 9th of October, 1993, I was traded for Serbian soldiers being held hostage and sent to Tuzla, a free city in northeastern Bosnia. I brought my daughters back from Slovenia, and my whole family went to live in Vodice. A few years later, we came to America. " Osman looks down at his hands, which are now clenched fists. " When I talk about what they did to me, I get agitated," he explains. " I imagine being beaten and tortured.

I still have nightmares. It made no sense that my neighbor, someone I ate with and invited to my house, would be the first to turn a gun on me. " I don't understand the trauma and torture these people put on innocent Bosnians. My cousin watched 13 members of his family killed in front of him, including his eight-month-old daughter and two-year-old son. This is what gives me the most pain, the death of children and women. I saw a house burned to the ground with 30 people locked inside. I will never forget these things. I can never forget. " We sit in silence for a few moments while he gathers his thoughts. It frustrates me that no one will talk about what happened. It is not recognized as a genocide. It is painful to talk about, but it should not be forgotten. I wish more people knew about the genocide and the terrible things Bosnian Muslims endured. " He smiles at me, and though his story is horrific and hard to hear, I smile back. " My English is good? " he asks, laughing. It's hard for me, a sheltered teen living in Utah, to understand how someone can even function after surviving four concentration camps. I ask one last question: " What do you want people to

know? " My story," he replies, " is the story of many Bosnians. This happened, and it was terrible and still hurts me, but people need to know what they [Bosnian Serbs] did to us. We had no help for five years. This was not only the Bosnian war, it was the Bosnian genocide. The past cannot be erased. Our stories should not be forgotten. " Osman has since returned to Bosnia, but he says his country still has many problems and will never be fully whole and peaceful. He is one of the strongest people I have ever met.

http://www.teenink.com/hot_topics/all/article/328317/Bosnia-The-Hidden-Genocide/