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A Reflection on the Survival of Fahrudin Meminović

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It is difficult to understand the executioners of the genocide in Srebrenica. What were they doing? Why were they doing it? What were they thinking? How could they have done what they did? In Srebrenica MCMXCV [2017], Emir Suljagić recounts a testimony from an executioner told to the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia after a massacre near Srebrenica in July 1995:

> From that pile, that heap of dead bodies that did not resemble human bodies any more, a human being emerged. I said human being, but it was actually a boy, five or six years old. It was unbelievable. Unbelievable. A human being came out and started walking towards a path, a path along which men were standing, doing their job, carrying automatic rifles… And then, out of nowhere they all put their guns down and all of them were just paralysed. And it was only a child in front of them. . . . And this child was covered in the tissue and intestines of other humans . . . And this child emerged from the pile of executed people, calling: «Babo»…. this is their word for father. The boy said, «Babo, where are you?»

This executioner's testimony uncovers the face of genocide: its blank, humanless face, as perhaps no other testimony can. When the executioners saw the young boy, they saw a human being and put down their guns. They stopped doing their evil action because they saw for a moment how evil it was.

We have to ask ourselves: What happened to the young boy searching for his father? Was he killed? Did the executioners spare him? The nihilism of genocide pushes us to assume the boy was killed along with his father and others. The hatred in genocide is totalizing. Genocide is pure hatred. The negativity moves us to assume the worst and lures us into the black hole of genocide and its monstrosity.

The young boy, however, was not killed. One of the executioners, a Serbian soldier, took the young boy, whose name is Fahrudin Meminović, away from the execution site. He told his commanding officer, who ordered that the boy be killed, that he would take care of it. The Serbian soldier then took the the wounded seven year to a hospital in Zvornik where he was treated. When the nurses in the hospital learned that the young boy was a Bosniak, they attempted to kill him. Doctors, however, guarded the

young child and moved him to another ward. Fahrudin Meminović eventually was moved to a hospital in Tuzla where his uncle found him. As a young adult, Fahrudin Meminović then testified as a protected witness at the Hague against Ratko Mladić. There he saw the man who saved him, and the two met the next evening. They cried together when they saw each other. A few years later, Fahrudin Meminović courageously decided he no longer wanted to be a protected witness and he wanted his identity to be known.

The man who saved the life of Fahrudin Meminović acted as a human being. How do Serbs now view his action? Do Serbs respect the moral character of this man? Do Serbs honor this man? The Serbian soldier who choose to save Fahrudin Meminović is now a protected witness and chooses to remain so in order to protect his family as well as himself, since many Serbs see his act of human kindness as a betrayal of the Serbian nation.

The situation is comparable to the action of Anton Schmid, an Austrian recruit who saved close to three hundred Jews in Vilnius during World War II. Nazis found out, caught Schmid, sentenced him to death, and executed him. Before his execution, Schmid wrote to his family, “I have just acted as a human and I did not want to hurt anyone.” While there were Germans in Germany and Austria who viewed Schmid as a traitor, today he is honored for his righteous actions on behalf of Jews. Moreover, Schmid is honored not only by Jews but also by Germans. In 2003, a street in Vienna was named after Schmid. In 2020, a German army barracks was renamed after Schmid holding him up as a model for German soldiers.. Rudolf Scharping, the German Defense Minister, said, “We are not free to choose our history, but we can choose the examples we take from that history.” Germany chose to take the example of Anton Schmid from their history, more than fifty years after World War II.

Imagine Serbs honoring this unknown soldier who saved Fahrudin Meminović. Imagine the Serbian army renaming the Topčider barracks near Belgrade where Ratko Mladić was hidden for many years. Imagine the president of Serbia presiding over such a dedication ceremony either today or fifty years from today.

On April 11, 1992, Radomir Konstantinović, read the following text to Beogradski Krug (Belgrade Circle) in Belgrade. Then again on May 18, 1997 he read the same text to to Krug 99 (Circle 99) in Sarajevo.

> Totalitarianism makes people blind to monsters, and that is what is the most terrible. What is terrible in totalitarianism is that there is less and less of the terrible. The lack of the terrible, impossibility to understand monstrosity, invisibility of the monster, that turning of the monster into phantom–is not that the sign that we descended into monstrosity? If I do not see the monster, is it not because I myself became the monster?

To see the monster, we need to see what is other to the monster. In order not to become the monster, we need to see the non-monster. We need to see the human being. In doing so, we see the character of the monster, the monstrosity and

terribleness of the monster. Negativity cannot bear witness to negativity. Negativity cannot bear witness to itself. What is other to negativity bears witness to negativity. Hate cannot bear witness to hate. What is other to hate bears witness to hate. Konstantinović continued, “The basic aspiration of every totalitarianism, as the creator of monstrosity, is this aspiration towards its invisibility; the aspiration to conquer us completely, to become our “ego.” The rescue of Fahrudin Meminović by the Serbian man and the rescue of the three hundred Jews by Anton Schmid are examples of non-monstrosity. We see the human being which requires us then to see the totalizing terribleness of the monster. It requires us to step outside of totalitarian’s monstrosity.

Literature

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GENOCID NAD BOŠNJACIMA, SREBRENICA 1995-2020:
Uzroci, razmjere i posljedice

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