

Tali Nates

Johannesburg Holocaust & Genocide Centre

tali@jhbholocaust.co.za

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USING MULTIDIRECTIONAL MEMORY TO LEARN ABOUT WAR AND GENOCIDE IN BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA 30 YEARS LATER

Abstract: The 1990's were years of transformation, marked by the end of the Cold War, the launch of the internet, and the rise of commercial satellite use. These were also years of conflict, war and genocide in many regions in the world. In the mid-1990s, South Africa, Bosnia and Herzegovina (part of former Yugoslavia), and Rwanda experienced pivotal events. Rwanda and the former Yugoslavia faced intense conflict, war and genocide. Meanwhile, South Africa avoided all-out war, celebrating democracy after decades of oppression and conflict that cost the lives of many. This chapter will look at an exhibition developed specially to mark 30 years of democracy in South Africa, war and genocide in Bosnia and Herzegovina and commemoration of the genocide against the Tutsi in Rwanda. It invites you to explore this decade of transition in these three countries, examining the choices made by leaders and ordinary people in a multidirectional way. It covers Rwanda's history, the 1994 Genocide and its aftermath, Bosnia and Herzegovina's conflict and war, the genocide in Srebrenica, and the quest for post-war justice, as well as South Africa's journey through apartheid and democracy.

Keywords: war, genocide, apartheid, Srebrenica, Rwanda, South Africa, Bosnia and Herzegovina, multidirectional memory, exhibition, justice.

KORIŠTENJE MULTIDIREKCIJALNOG PAMĆENJA ZA UČENJE O RATU I GENOCIDU U BOSNI I HERCEGOVINI 30 GODINA KASNIJE

Sažetak: Devedesete godine bile su godine transformacije, obilježene završetkom hladnog rata, pojavom interneta i porastom komercijalne upotrebe satelita. Istovremeno, to su bile i godine sukoba, ratova i genocida u mnogim dijelovima svijeta. Sredinom 1990-ih, Južnoafrička Republika, Bosna i Hercegovina (nekada dio bivše Jugoslavije) i Ruanda doživjele su ključne događaje u svojoj historiji. Ruanda i područje bivše Jugoslavije suočile su se s intenzivnim sukobima, ratovima i genocidom, dok je Južnoafrička Republika izbjegla potpuni rat te nakon decenija represije i sukoba koji su odnijeli mnoge živote, proslavila uspostavu demokratije. Ovo poglavlje bavi se izložbom osmišljenom s ciljem obilježavanja 30 godina demokratije u Južnoafričkoj Republici, rata i genocida u Bosni i Hercegovini te sjećanja na genocid nad Tutsijima u Ruandi. Ono poziva na istraživanje te decenije tranzicije koja se desila u tri države, pritom analizirajući odluke koje su donosili i politički lideri i obični ljudi, iz multidirekcijske perspektive. Tekst obuhvata historiju Ruande, genocid iz 1994. godine i njegove posljedice, sukob i rat u Bosni i Hercegovini, genocid u Srebrenici i potragu za pravdom nakon rata, kao i put Južnoafričke Republike kroz apartheid i demokratiju.

Ključne riječi: rat, genocid, apartheid, Srebrenica, Ruanda, Južnoafrička Republika, Bosna i Hercegovina, multidirekcijsko pamćenje, izložba, pravda.

Introduction

The 1990's were years of transformation, marked by the end of the Cold War, the launch of the internet, and the rise of commercial satellite use. These were also years of conflict, war and genocide in many regions in the world.

In the mid-1990s, South Africa, Bosnia and Herzegovina (part of the former Yugoslavia), and Rwanda experienced pivotal events. Rwanda

and the former Yugoslavia faced intense conflict, war and genocide. Meanwhile, South Africa avoided all-out war, celebrating democracy after decades of oppression and conflict that cost the lives of many.

This chapter will explore an exhibition developed specially by the Johannesburg Holocaust & Genocide Centre to mark 30 years of democracy in South Africa, 30 years to the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina and the genocide in Srebrenica, and the 30th commemoration of the genocide against the Tutsi in Rwanda. This exhibition invites the visitor to explore the 1990's as a decade of transition in these three countries, examining in a multidirectional way the choices made by leaders and ordinary people. The exhibition also covers the quest for post-war justice and democracy.

The Multidirectional Philosophy of the Johannesburg Holocaust & Genocide Centre

The Johannesburg Holocaust & Genocide Centre (JHGC), an institution which is a public-private partnership with the city of Johannesburg, officially opened in March 2019. The Centre explores the history of genocides in the 20th century with a focus on the case studies of the Holocaust and the 1994 Genocide in Rwanda. It focuses on the connections between those histories and past and contemporary human rights violations in South Africa, urging visitors to understand the consequences of prejudice, racism, antisemitism, and homophobia. It also aims to increase awareness to discrimination based on gender, disabilities and 'othering' of all kinds.

When the JHGC was founded, a core philosophy envisioned was of telling the history of the Holocaust and of genocide and human rights' abuse in a multidirectional, non-linear and thematic way. The permanent exhibition and education programs focus on the history of genocide in the 20th century, looking at the role Raphael Lemkin played in its concept and legality. Lemkin, a Polish Jewish lawyer born in 1900, was troubled by the histories of violence against targeted groups such

as antisemitic pogroms in Eastern Europe and the Ottoman Empire's atrocities against Christian Armenians, was convinced that there was a need for internationally recognised legal protection of all national, racial, religious and social groups. In 1944, he coined the word genocide - a combination of the Greek word genos (race, tribe) and the Latin cide (killing) describing the crime that he so fervently wished to bring to the world's attention and action.

The word genocide was used to describe mass-murder for the first time at the International Military Tribunal in Nuremberg, which brought Nazi leaders to justice (1945 – 1946). In 1948, the newly established United Nations (UN) adopted the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of Genocide. In addition to the Genocide Convention, other international laws were developed later for example those related to 'crimes against humanity'.

The permanent exhibition at the JHGC, using the multidirectional lens, looks at atrocities before the coining of the word genocide such as the targeting of the Herero and Nama people in today's Namibia (1904-1907), the mass atrocities committed by the Ottoman Empire against Christian Armenians (1915-1923), the Holocaust (1933-1945) as well as the genocide against the Tutsi in Rwanda (1994), even after the coining of the word¹. Throughout the exhibition presented are connections to South Africa's painful history of crimes against humanity, apartheid and human rights abuses the country is facing today, such as xenophobic violence against refugees and immigrants from Africa. In its other halls, temporary exhibitions are always on display about for example, the genocide in Cambodia, the genocide in Srebrenica and human rights abuses in South Africa such as the abuse of people with disabilities².

¹ To learn more about the permanent exhibition of the JHGC and its philosophies, download its catalogue here: <https://www.jhbholocaust.co.za/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/JHGC%20Catalogue%20FA%20LR.pdf>

² The Life Esidimeni tragedy describes the death of 144 people at psychiatric facilities in Gauteng, South Africa. The reported causes included starvation and neglect. The JHGC was chosen by the Life Esidimeni families already in 2018 as a space for memory and dialogue, and hosted numerous exhibitions, conferences and meetings at the Centre.

The exhibition, ‘The 1990’s: years of Transition in South Africa, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Rwanda’ was on display as well.

The mission of the JHGC is as a place of memory, education, dialogue and lessons for humanity. Multidirectional memory is utilized throughout the exhibition, presenting history through the voices of witnesses: victims, resisters, rescuers, bystanders, collaborators and perpetrators as well as those who were moving from one category to another, about their dilemmas and choices. Displayed through photographs, artefacts, drawings, and testimonies, the JHGC is employing the arts to concentrate on the victims’ life before their murder. This philosophy of concentrating on life and not only on the victims’ suffering and moment of death, is emphasising and reclaiming their dignity and humanity, especially as this too was taken violently and brutally away from them by the perpetrators. The exhibition includes art, poetry and music in all its spaces and visitors activate their bodies throughout, looking up and down, pulling drawers or pull-out panels, watching films, reading poems and stories, listening to testimonies or to specially composed piece of music of Holocaust and Rwandan survivors singing and sharing their testimonies with each other at the garden of reflection³.

The last philosophical consideration in the creation of the JHGC was an active reflection on the saying “Never Again”. Those words are expressed again and again in speeches around the world. The cautionary words of Auschwitz survivor and writer Primo Levi greet the visitors as they are displayed prominently at the entrance to the JHGC: “It happened therefore it can happen again. This is the core of what we have to say. It can happen and it can happen anywhere”⁴.

For South Africans, multidirectional learning from the past is especially important. In April 1994, while South Africans were celebrating the end of apartheid and the country’s first democratic elections with its new President, Nelson Mandela, in Rwanda, in the same month, year and

³ To listen to the Soundscape and read more about its concept go to: <https://soundcloud.com/user-858426360/remember-ibuka>

⁴ Levi, Primo, *The Reawakening*. (New York: Touchstone published by Simon & Schuster, 1995), 215

continent, just 3 263 km away, South Africans were voting in their country's first democratic election. History of counties placed side by side looking at the same period can teach us about human behaviour, dilemmas and choices and their consequences. The next section will look at the exhibition dedicated to the 1990's in more detail.

A new multidirectional exhibition about The 1990's: Years of Transition in South Africa, Rwanda and Bosnia and Herzegovina

The Johannesburg Holocaust & Genocide Centre (JHGC), in partnership with Yale University, embarked on the creation of a new exhibition that would consider the history in the same decade of three countries side by side. This methodologies can assist in making connections, seeing parallels and differences and encouraging learning from each country's history and its lessons. South Africa, Rwanda and Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) are the countries chosen for this exhibition. The exhibition encourages learning about these three countries' historical narrative and how it influences their collective identities, the trauma inflicted over the years on its people and the attempt to heal this trauma through acknowledgment and recognition of these histories. The exhibition is accompanied by maps, photographs, a film, documents and quotes.

Thirty years after the end of apartheid and the transition to democracy in South Africa, the past still deeply influences the country's present and future. Racism, economic disparity, hate of the 'other', violence, prejudice, corruption and abuse of power still affects society today. After decades of conflict and injustice, there is no "magic cure" to the process of rebuilding, healing and transforming society.

In Rwanda, 30 years after the end of the genocide, the country is still in the process of healing and rebuilding itself. After massive destruction of all infrastructure, the education, justice, financial systems, and every aspect of life, reconstruction takes time. Other geo-political pressures and challenges and international relations are also playing a role in the

rebuilding of the country. The past in both countries in Africa is very much part of the present and future.

The 1990s were also years of conflict, war and genocide in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH). The Cold War (1947-1991) marked significant global changes both during and after its end. Defined by tensions between the United States of America (USA) and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR), it polarised the world along communist and anti-communist lines, influencing public opinion and power dynamics. Hostilities manifested through political, economic, and propaganda fronts, with numerous proxy wars, including in the Balkans, Mozambique and Namibia to name a few. The fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 symbolised a pivotal shift in global politics and conflicts. The Cold War highlighted how fear and suspicion, particularly the fear of communist domination (for example in South Africa known as the “Red Scare” or in Afrikaans “Rooi Gevaar”), drove many decisions by the USA and its allies.

After the transition from apartheid, war and genocide, in South Africa, Rwanda and BiH, societies had to find ways to live side by side, victims next to perpetrators. This is extremely challenging, especially for those individuals living with the trauma of the past. In an interview in 2004, the Executive Secretary of the National Unity and Reconciliation Commission (2002 - 2009) of Rwanda, Fatuma Ndangiza, shared her thoughts about how perpetrators and victims could be living together after the genocide: “Our policy is Unity and Reconciliation ... accommodating everybody, including the perpetrators. ... Killers have to live side-by-side with victims after the 1994 genocide. We cannot have a land of victims and a land of perpetrators. Despite whatever happened, they have to live side-by-side.”⁵

Adopting Ndangiza’s premise, in the three societies the exhibition explores, people had to live together which after genocide and mass atrocities is extremely challenging. In contrast, examining a historical example of post Second World War Germany, most Jewish survivors of the Holocaust left the country. Only a few thousand remained for the

⁵ Interview conducted by Tali Nates with Fatuma Ndangiza for a documentary film, SABC, July 2004.

next 50 years until the 1990's⁶. Only then with Jewish immigration from the former Soviet Union and the reunification of the country, memorials to the Holocaust began to be established in a meaningful way, such as the 2005 Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe in Berlin. Also, there was much development in methodologies of teaching about the Holocaust through testimonies of survivors or focusing on the victims. In South Africa, Rwanda and BiH, after years of violence and the destruction of trust, the three societies are still grappling with the question of how to rebuild trust and co-existence. It is important and interesting to observe that despite all the challenges stated above, those societies function relatively peacefully despite the tensions and the many challenges.

The exhibition inspired partners in Mozambique to translate it to Portuguese and add a fourth local historical case study, that of the post-colonial Mozambiquan civil war and the challenges the country is facing after that. More panels are also being developed about the aspect of peace education post war and genocide.

In the next section we presented the content of the exhibition about the history of South Africa, Rwanda and BiH and how the three countries confront their past of apartheid, war and genocide.

South Africa - Attempts To Heal a Nation

The exhibition looks first at the complex history of South Africa. It briefly covers early history of Dutch and British colonialism, war, and oppression. In 1948, apartheid was institutionalised and entrenched with the election of the National Party, leading to laws such as the Mixed Marriages Act (1949), the Group Areas Act (1950), the Suppression of Communism Act (1950), the Natives Act (1952), and the Bantu Education Act (1953) and other crimes against humanity.

⁶ DW. (2021, 21 February). <https://www.dw.com/en/how-jewish-life-developed-in-germany-after-the-holocaust/a-56604526>

Resistance to apartheid included marches, like the Sharpeville protest in 1960 and subsequently, massacre, armed resistance, strikes, boycotts, and artistic expression. The 1976 Soweto Uprisings, where students were met with extreme police violence, severely impacted the apartheid regime. The International Convention on the Suppression and Punishment of the Crime of Apartheid was adopted in 1973, leading to stringent international sanctions. The 1980s saw major instability, resulting in the declaration of a State of Emergency in 1985, that further enhanced the regime. The end of the Cold War shifted the political landscape in South Africa. Without the fear of communism, international and internal pressures mounted against the apartheid government, leading to significant changes in the 1990s.

The 1990s were pivotal years for South Africa, beginning with the unbanning of the African National Congress (ANC), South African Communist Party (SACP), and other organisations in the beginning of that decade. This was followed by Nelson Mandela's release from prison, marking a significant step toward democracy. From 1991, multi-party talks began, and apartheid laws were repealed. The apartheid regime which began in 1948 was starting to end.

The end of 1991 saw the first Convention for a Democratic South Africa (CODESA), where 92 organisations gathered to discuss the mechanisms and technicalities of the transition process. Parties agreed on a nonpartisan interim government to manage the transition. Despite these advances, there was a referendum in 1992 where white voters were asked if they would endorse the 'reform process', which 69% voted in favour of. Change was more difficult for some still.

In the same year CODESA II resulted in a deadlock as despite consensus for an interim government, the delegates could not agree on the form it would take. Talks resumed months later with the Multi-Party Negotiation Process which tried to resolve many of these issues. Negotiations continued into 1993, paving the way for the first democratic elections.

While South Africa's transition mechanisms were being developed, the country faced significant instability. In Natal (now KwaZulu Natal) and

parts of Transvaal (now Gauteng) violence escalated from already high levels, and human rights violations occurred. The violence was primarily between the ANC and the Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP). According to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) and the Goldstone report, the IFP were armed and supported by elements within the South African Police and KwaZulu Police. Direct police violence and use of excessive force against demonstrators for example, was prevalent during this period, with the use of lethal force being commonplace resulting in large numbers of deaths.

The white right-wing violently opposed the transition, carrying out attacks, killings, and bombings. On 10 April 1993, Chris Hani, the leader of the South African Communist Party was assassinated by extremists, almost derailing the peace talks. Shortly after, in June, the Afrikaner Resistance Movement (AWB) crashed into the arena where negotiations for the transition towards democracy were being held. This violence made an already difficult period of negotiations more unstable. However, this resistance did not succeed in thwarting South Africa's first democratic elections. Despite numerous challenges, on 27 April 1994, South Africa held its first democratic elections. The ANC's Nelson Mandela was elected as President, forming the first Government of National Unity.

While South African society was still coming to terms with apartheid, the TRC was established in 1995. Chaired by Archbishop Desmond Tutu, it was tasked with uncovering truths about apartheid crimes committed between 1960 and 1994. Its aim was to achieve reconciliation between South Africans and initiate the reconstruction of society. Victims shared their stories, and it was decided that perpetrators would not be held criminally or civilly liable but granted amnesty if fully confessing their crimes. The country's choice was to focus on forgiveness, healing, and reconciliation, rather than retribution and punishment. Initially set to run until 1998, the TRC was extended to 2002. Its effectiveness has been questioned since, with the chasm between hearing the truth and achieving reconciliation being regarded as a failure by many. Thirty years on, many still feel that justice has not been fully realised with the lack of restitution and reparation for the crimes of the past not achieved in any significant way.

Looking towards the future though, in 1996, the first official Constitution of South Africa was adopted, marking the advent of a democratic state founded on the principles of human dignity, equality, and freedom. The Constitution and Bill of Rights of South Africa (Act 108 of 1996) were directly influenced by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) adopted by the United Nations in December 1948. While UN was adopting UDHR, South Africa was legalising apartheid in the same year. It would take another 50 years for South Africa to sign the Universal Declaration of Human Rights on 10 December 1998.

Many museums were created around the country to tell the story of South Africa's turbulent history⁷. Museums, exhibitions and memorials are important tool in the day after atrocities. The curriculum of the country was also changed to include this history as an important action of recognition of the need to learn from the past.

Rwanda: A complex History of Violence and Genocide

In April 2024 South Africa and Rwanda shared the milestone of a 30-year anniversary of the end of apartheid and genocide. The next case study of transition in the 1990s the exhibition delve into is that of Rwanda.

The exhibition begins with a brief historical view of Rwanda. Historically, Rwanda's population was structured through ubwooko (social clans). During colonial times, first under Germany and then Belgium, the importance of so-called ethnic identity was exaggerated, cementing the population into three groups, namely the majority Hutu, and minorities Tutsi, and Twa. The relationship between the groups was complicated, just like the history of the country. All spoke Kinyarwanda, lived on the same hills, went to the same churches, and interacted socially and economically.

⁷ Those are museums such as the Apartheid Museum, Constitution Hill, Liliesleaf, Freedom Park and Robben Island to name a few.

After independence in 1962 and as political and economic tensions grew, the Tutsi minority became the target of discrimination, expulsion, and killings, especially in the period of transition in 1959 and the first years of Hutu political dominance in the 1960s. Eruptions of violence were interspersed by periods of relatively peaceful coexistence, yet no one was brought to justice for the violence. Years of tension and conflict, combined with the increasing economic, social and political problems that Rwanda faced in the 1990s, brought Hutu radicals to blame the Tutsi for all of the country's problems. Dehumanization and demonization of the Tutsi started prior to 1990s but it was intensified while RPF penetrated into Rwanda in 1990.

Propaganda played a crucial role in inciting genocide. After the Rwanda Patriotic Front (RPF⁸) penetration into Rwanda in 1990, extremist media demonised the Tutsi, labelling them as *inyenzi* (cockroaches) and accusing them of collaborating with the *inkotanyi* (meaning warrior in Kinyarwanda but refers to the RPF). The magazine *Kangura* (The Awakening), founded in 1990, spread hatred against the Tutsi. To reach the rural masses and unemployed youth the government used radio. Radio Rwanda became the main tool of anti-Tutsi propaganda from March 1992, calling for the targeting of all Tutsi. Propaganda intensified after the Arusha Accord in August 1993, with the launch of Radio Television Libre des Mille Collines (RTLM), backed by President Juvénal Habyarimana, which would become the main voice of the genocidal regime. No action was taken by the international community in the buildup to the genocide, despite clear warnings about Hutu extremists gathering weapons and training militia coming from the commander of the United Nations Assistance Mission for Rwanda (UNAMIR) Lieutenant-General Romeo Dallaire.

From 7 April 1994, extremist government-led militias began a planned campaign to murder all Tutsi and anyone opposing their genocidal plan. Over the next 100 days, approximately one million people were

⁸ The RPF originated in 1987 as a political and military movement founded in Kampala, Uganda, by Rwandan Tutsi refugees who had fled the country due to ethnic violence mainly in the 1950's and 60's.

killed in Rwanda. After Habyarimana's assassination on 6 April 1994, many feared violence would erupt. Those fears were confirmed when the extremist radio station RTLM called Tutsi "enemies of Rwanda", "snakes", and "cockroaches" that needed to be eliminated. Those opposing the genocide, including moderate Hutu Prime Minister Agathe Uwilingiyimana, were killed first. Violence spread quickly from Kigali to the rest of the country. Many Tutsi tried to flee but were stopped and killed at Interahamwe (Those who attack together) roadblocks after their identity cards were checked.

The genocidal regime forced Tutsi to gather in churches (who used to be spaces of safety during past massacres), sport fields and schools, which this time, became sites of mass murder. Despite some organised resistance, the victims' sticks and stones were no match for the genocidaires' guns, grenades, and machetes. The genocide was marked by extraordinary cruelty, including torture, rape, and mutilation. Some Tutsi survived by being hidden by Hutu and other friends, neighbours, or strangers. From April to July, Tutsi of all ages, genders, and social standings were targeted, and survivors often emerged alone, having lost their entire families.

When the killings started, Lieutenant-General Dallaire repeatedly pleaded for help. Yet, after ten United Nations (UN) soldiers were killed, the Security Council reduced its peacekeeping forces from 2 500 to 270 soldiers. With a weak mandate, a decimated force, and no outside support, Dallaire's men could do little to stop the killings. No Western country was willing to send troops, instead nations like the USA, France, and Belgium evacuated their citizens. Furthermore, the Organisation of African Unity failed to condemn Rwanda's genocidal government and was ineffectual.

Since 1994, key figures like USA President Bill Clinton, UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan, and Belgian Prime Minister Guy Verhofstadt have expressed remorse for not responding to the killings. However, major actors like the Roman Catholic Church, deeply tied to the Rwandan government and complicit in the violence, have not officially apologised. In March 2017, Pope Francis asked for forgiveness for the church's role, but this was not an official apology.

In Rwanda, when the RPF ended the genocide in July 1994, the country was devastated. All basic infrastructure was destroyed, millions of people were displaced, and the majority of survivors had lost their entire families. Many women suffered the consequences of rape and sexual violence, and orphaned children had to fend for themselves as all social services seized to exist. The immense trauma post genocide led to long-term psychological issues, but many survivors showed resilience, rebuilding their lives and forming support groups, as well as creating and preserving memorial sites.

One major challenge was bringing perpetrators to justice. At the end of 1994, the United Nations established the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR), seated in Arusha, Tanzania, that tried the high-level organisers of the genocide. The ICTR exercised jurisdiction alongside Rwandan national criminal courts, and later also traditional, community-based Gacaca courts, where survivors could face the accused and testify. The Rwandan National Commission for the Fight Against Genocide reported that nearly two million people were tried by the Gacaca courts, resulting in sentences ranging from imprisonment to community reintegration.

Survivors began sharing their testimonies in a meaningful way more than ten years after the genocide. The opening of the Kigali Genocide Memorial in April 2004, allowed many survivors to find a place for mourning, sharing testimonies and finding a space where their loss and pain can be heard, acknowledged and recognised.

At the Johannesburg Holocaust & Genocide Centre, Rwandan genocide survivors who settled in South Africa meet regularly and volunteer to share their testimonies with schools and other groups. Their testimonies were captured 20 years after the genocide and their photographs, documents and artefacts are being preserved by the Centre's archive. The survivors' testimonies were featured in films, podcasts and books.⁹

⁹ Portraits of Survival Volume 2 (2022). Johannesburg Holocaust & Genocide Centre publication. <https://indd.adobe.com/view/e4d8660a-e098-4a6f-9fb5-710e4fa6f273>

The sharing of those testimonies and narratives led to surprising results at times. In 2010, Rwandan Survivor, Xavier Ngabo, shared his testimony with students from St. Stithians High School in Johannesburg. After hearing his story and his need to find out what happened to his family during the genocide, students fundraised to sponsor his return to Rwanda to attend the Gacaca court and then find the remains of his parents who he managed to bury. During this emotional trip, he uncovered a key to his parents' house and a rosary belonging to his murdered mother, Beatrice, that he donated to the JHGC to bear witness to his story for years to come. Sharing his testimony was an important process that helped him to face his trauma. In Xavier's case, his personal narrative, together with the country's process of seeking justice through the Gacaca courts, allowed him to bury his parents, and having his story captured at a museum site, teaching thousands annually.

Bosnia and Herzegovina: Genocide in Europe in the 1990s

The third historical narration in the exhibition describes the history, war and genocide in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) and its aftermath. The panels include many iconic photographs by the late Paul Lowe who shared them with the Johannesburg Centre and envisioned having a full exhibition of his body of work from BiH dedicated to 30 years to the genocide in Srebrenica at the Johannesburg Holocaust & Genocide Centre in 2025. Tragically, with his sudden and untimely death in October 2024, the idea could not be realised.

Bosnia and Herzegovina's history is complex, often shaped by powerful regional forces. From the 15th century, it was ruled by the Ottoman Empire until the Austro-Hungarian Empire took control in 1878. The region also played a key role in the events leading to World War I. In the inter-war period, it became part of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes. Following World War II, Bosnia and Herzegovina was incorporated into the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRY) under the leadership of Josip Broz Tito. This historical tapestry created a

diverse ethnic and religious landscape, with Bosniaks (Muslims), Serbs (Orthodox Christians), and Croats (Roman Catholics) coexisting. These complexities made the region susceptible to nationalist ambitions. After Tito's death in 1980, rising nationalist sentiments and ethnic tensions escalated, culminating in severe conflicts during the 1990s as the Yugoslav federation disintegrated. This period left a lasting impact on Bosnia and Herzegovina's socio-political landscape.

Following the dissolution of the SFRY in 1991, the majority of Bosnia and Herzegovina's population voted for independence in a 1992 referendum. However, most of the country's Serb population boycotted the referendum, opposing independence. Bosnian Serb politicians declared an autonomous Serb region, later called Republika Srpska, led by President Radovan Karadžić. With support from Serbian leader Slobodan Milošević and the Yugoslav National Army (JNA), they launched a brutal war on Bosnia and Herzegovina. In April 1992, units of the JNA, joined by the newly established Bosnian Serb Army (VRS) under General Ratko Mladić, captured large Bosnian territories, fighting against the Army of the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina (ARBiH).

Sarajevo, Bosnia's capital, endured the longest siege in modern warfare from April 1992 to February 1996, resulting in over 10 000 deaths. Army of Republic Srpska destroyed cultural monuments, including the National Library, and carried out horrendous attacks, such as the massacre at Markale Market. A campaign of war crimes, "ethnic cleansing", and genocide killed tens of thousands and violently displaced more than two million people.

After the ARBiH recaptured Srebrenica, it became one of the few enclaves in Bosnia that provided a refuge for thousands of Bosniaks who were under constant attack. In April 1993, the UN Security Council declared Srebrenica a UN-protected "safe area", giving many inhabitants false hope that the violence was ending. In spring 1995, Karadžić issued "Directive 7", ordering VRS troops to create an unbearable situation for Srebrenica's inhabitants. On 6 July 1995, the VRS attacked, setting fire to homes and forcing thousands to flee to the UN base in Potočari, where the Dutch UN Battalion (Dutchbat) who were under the command of the

United Nations Protection Force (UNPROFOR), were stationed. ARBiH soldiers could not prevent Dutchbat troops from abandoning their posts, and on 11 July 1995, Mladić entered Srebrenica, declaring, “We give this town to the Serb nation... the time has come to take revenge on the Turks in this region.” That night, around 15 000 Bosniak men and boys attempted to escape through the forests toward Nezuk in what is known as the “Death March”, but two-thirds were captured and killed. There was no resistance from the Dutchbat peacekeeping forces when the VRS took control of the UN base in Potočari. Bosniak men were separated from their families, and over 25 000 women and children were forcibly deported. In just over a week, Bosnian Serb forces systematically murdered more than 8 372 men and boys, recognised today as the genocide in Srebrenica.

The war ended in December 1995 with the signing of a compromised peace agreement, the Dayton Accords, which instituted protection for minorities and laid a foundation for the voluntary return of refugees and displaced persons. The agreement also established the country as a fragile, highly decentralised, and ethnically divided state in which an international civilian high-representative remained authorised to impose legislation and to remove domestic officials in order to protect the peace.

The international crimes during the Bosnian war were prosecuted by several different mechanisms, most notably the United Nations created International Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY, 1993-2017), which also declared atrocities committed in Srebrenica against Bosniak men and boys as genocide. The ICTY tried and convicted Karadžić and Mladić among others for genocide, crimes against humanity, and war crimes committed in Srebrenica. The International Residual Mechanism for Criminal Tribunals (IRMCT) was established in 2010, specifically to complete the work of the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR) and the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY). This is still a process that is taking place at this time.

Civil society play an important role in the process of seeking justice after the genocide. The association “Movement of Mothers of Srebrenica and Žepa Enclaves” also known as the “Mothers of Srebrenica”, is a

group of mothers and other relatives of victims of the genocide in Srebrenica, who are activists and lobbyists, seeking justice, recognition of the atrocities, and support for survivors. They played an important role in the ICTY process of justice and the recognition and memory of the genocide after that. Other organisation playing an important part in the post genocide rebuilding is the Post Conflict Research Centre (PCRC) which provides peace education, post conflict research and transitional justice processes. It was founded and lead by Velma Šarić, who is currently its President and also Founder and Editor-in-Chief of Balkan Diskurs. I had the honour of being interviewed for Balkan Diskurs in April 2025, reflecting on memory work in South Africa and BiH.¹⁰ The scope of this chapter does not permit me to cover all the many organisations who contribute immensely to the process of confronting the past and rebuilding society.

Memorials and Museums also play an important part in coming to terms with BiH and especially Srebrenica's past. The Srebrenica-Potočari Memorial Center, is a Memorial and Cemetery for the Victims of the 1995 Genocide and was established in 2000. The Memorial is dedicated to preserving history and combatting ignorance and hatred. The Memorial organises also the Day of Remembrance for the Victims of the Srebrenica genocide which takes place annually on 11 July.

In May 2024, the General Assembly of the United Nations adopted a resolution (A/78/L.67/Rev.1) designating 11 July as the “International Day of Reflection and Commemoration of the 1995 Genocide in Srebrenica”, to be observed annually. However BiH faces many continuous challenges as it strive to rebuild itself 30 years after the war and genocide.

¹⁰ Accessed on 25 April 2025: <https://balkandiskurs.com/en/2025/04/13/tali-nates-making-connections-is-key/>

Conclusions: Connections and Reflections

In retrospect, history's events and their connections become clearer. Patterns of "good", "bad", and everything in between reflect humanity's nature. Themes of 'othering', hatred, power dynamics, manipulations and struggles are becoming more apparent when history is studied, but so is the desire for recognition, justice and reconciliation, as can be seen in the case studies this exhibition focuses on. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, Rwanda, and South Africa, many perpetrators remain unpunished, raising questions about true justice. These nations still grapple with the legacies of their tumultuous pasts. The 1990s marked a decade of transition, and the 21st century has continued with rapid changes, shaping our understanding of ourselves, history, and the future.

The racist system in South Africa and the brutal war and genocide in Rwanda as well as Bosnia and Herzegovina separated people and there is never a quick fix that could resolve the pain of the past and make it disappear in an instant. It requires ongoing work from all parts of society to heal individuals and communities after such an enormous catastrophe.

In this chapter I attempted to highlight some of the many components one should seek including mechanisms of justice, the creation of memorials and museums, implementing education curriculums and extra-curricular programmes that acknowledge the past, and importantly, recognition of this history and acknowledgement of the pain and trauma individuals and communities went through.

Museums and Education Centres such as the Johannesburg Holocaust & Genocide Centre, the Kigali Genocide Memorial and the Srebrenica Memorial Centre, through their exhibitions that explore history through a multidirectional lens and creating spaces for dialogue where learning from history can encourage connections and critical thinking, are essential.

We should pay attention and listen to the stories and warnings of the victims, survivors and witnesses of mass atrocities and genocide.

In the words of Holocaust survivor, writer and Nobel Prize Lauriat Elie Wiesel: “When you listen to a witness, you become a witness.”¹¹ Through listening to the narratives of painful pasts and empowering next generations through education and critical thinking, the trauma and pain can begin healing.

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¹¹ Taken from Elie Wiesel’s speech during the March of the Living in Auschwitz-Birkenau, April 1990.