

By: Dženeta Karabegović

Last weekend marked the 20th anniversary of the Dayton Peace Agreement. It marks the end to three weeks of negotiations between three presidents: Alija Izetbegović of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Franjo Tuđman of Croatia, and Slobodan Milošević of Serbia, after three years of a bloody conflict in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The 1992 – 1995 war is most often remembered for the number of displaced (up to 2 million) people, the coining of the term ethnic cleansing, rape being used as systematic weapon of war, and ultimately, the Srebrenica Genocide, the worst atrocity on European soil since WWII.

[The ERC Starting Grant Project ‘Diasporas and Contested Sovereignty’](#) hosted a roundtable discussion in order to mark the Dayton Agreement. The event aimed to analyze some of the lessons learned, but also to demonstrate the challenges, particularly vis-à-vis Bosnian diaspora living across the globe, peacebuilding, transitional justice, and European integration. Bringing together both individuals from the greater Coventry and Birmingham communities, as well as the Warwick community, the event was meant to shed a bit more light on diaspora activism in the context of post-conflict countries, an issue that lies at the heart of the ‘Diasporas and Contested Sovereignty’ project but unfortunately receives little coverage. Further, the event aimed to highlight work about remembrance in regards to the Srebrenica Genocide through the work of a UK initiative, the [Remembering Srebrenica](#) charity.

[Dr. Maria Koinova](#), Reader in PAIS and the Principal Investigator of the project, opened the roundtable event. Upon welcoming both the panel participants as well as thanking the attendees, she introduced the aims of the ‘Diasporas and Contested Sovereignty’ project. Further, she outlined the Dayton Peace Accord and [how it came to fruition](#). In particular she noted that it has helped to maintain peace over the last twenty years, perhaps its greatest achievement. Connecting this to issues of diaspora, she spoke of [Annex 7](#), which allowed for refugee return. Elaborating, Dr. Koinova noted: “By embedding clauses of refugee returns in the pre-war areas, Dayton did not allow for the creation of ethnically homogenous territories, but did not challenge the rule of ethnic politics, either. This is one of the most contested and problematic issues of present-day Bosnia.”

She finished her presentation by sharing some of her own fieldwork experience researching [diaspora in the Netherlands](#). Before ending her presentation, she noted how Dutch post-Yugoslav diaspora members connected hate speech and political rhetoric of far-right parties in the Netherlands to similar hate speech that helped bring war to Yugoslavia and remains on the offensive today in European societies, further triggered by the refugee crisis in Syria and the Mediterranean.

[Dr. Eric Gordy](#) spoke more broadly about the consequences of Dayton on Bosnian and Herzegovinian society, political community, and the impositions thereon by Bosnian ‘ethnoparasitic’ political elites. His talk elucidated the need for constitutional change in Bosnia and Herzegovina as the Dayton Peace Accord was never meant to be a permanent solution. He highlighted this by noting the country’s constitution is actually [Annex 4](#) of the Dayton Peace Agreement, as well as the need for changing election provisions in light of the [Sejdić Finci](#) and [Azra Zornić](#) rulings by the European Court of Human Rights.

[Dr. Waqar Azmi](#) focused his presentation both on the work of the [Remembering Srebrenica](#) charity, but also on the importance of remembrance of atrocities in helping societies overcome ideologies of hate, such as that evidenced in Bosnia and Herzegovina during 1992 – 1995. “Memory shapes and teaches us.” This kind of work provides a wonderful example of how remembrance activities can not only help raise awareness about specific events, but at the same time start dialogue about the consequences of division in societies, both in countries where genocide happened but also more broadly. As part of their outreach activities, Dr. Azmi highlighted organizing more than 200 remembrance events as well as several education initiatives.

I was the final speaker. Outlining my doctoral work, I noted the importance of including diasporas in transitional justice processes in post-conflict countries such as Bosnia and Herzegovina. Elaborating on an [article published last year](#), I argued that diaspora cultural production can in some cases [be more moderate](#), actually moving beyond the dominant ethnonationalist public debates evidenced in Bosnia and Herzegovina’s post-conflict political environment today on one hand, while at the same time reaffirming belonging to the specific host country and the diaspora community within, on the other. [Noting ongoing research](#), I spoke about how better understanding how diaspora utilize frameworks of transitional justice and their ability to shift between scales when they mobilize can help inform us about similar global movements and initiatives. Moreover, it can inform us of how the refugees of today might mobilize towards their homelands tomorrow.

The event ended with very engaging questions posed to roundtable participants. This led to a discussion about [memorialization in Bosnia and Herzegovina](#) as well as more broadly, connections between Bosnian diaspora and the plenum movement and [parties that do not identify as ethnonationalist](#), as well as what we can learn about modern day nation-states from Bosnia and Herzegovina and [understanding the pitfalls of careless comparisons between Bosnia and Herzegovina and Syria](#).

The presentations were recorded and video will be available on the [‘Diasporas and Contested Sovereignty’ website](#) shortly.

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Main Photo Quote: View of Bosnian landscape through the remains of a house from which a family was displaced during the war and has not returned to since. Credit: Dzeneta Karabegovic, 2013.