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ELITOCIDE AND GENOCIDE IN B&H*

In the Spring of the year 1992 the British TV reporter Michael Nicholson named the fact of elimination of several tens of prominent and leading men of Bijeljina, a town at the northeast of Bosnia and Hercegovina, *elitocide*.¹ After the take-over of the town core the imported para-military units from Serbia, the so called Arkan's Tigers, following previously composed identification lists located the local non-Serb political, intellectual, cultural-clerical and business elites, arrested them and shortly after liquidated them. Using the term *elitocide* Nicholson has in fact been the first to semantically explain the events that affected in identical and coordinated manner the higher strata of the Bosniak and Croatian local communities at north, west and east of Bosnia and Hercegovina, i.e. in nearly all war afflicted areas. Namely, in the period of just a few months Serb paramilitary formations in the broader areas of the towns Bijeljina, Brčko, Višegrad, Zvornik, Bratunac, Foča, Prijedor and Sanski Most neutralized the influence of the local non-Serb elites (by elimination, prosecution or imprisonment) that had as a consequence the destruction and disintegration of the local civilian population.

Fourteen years later, the public opinion, as well as the legal science and sociology, mainly interpret the crimes in Bosnia and Hercegovina through a prism of judicially proven genocide over the Bosniak population of the narrower rayon of eastern Bosnia (genocide-in-part in Srebrenica, in July, 1995). In addition, brisk discussions are taking place in scientific, political and other circles whether mass killings of the Bosniaks in other parts of the country constitute a criminal act of genocide whose criminal law classifica-

tion is chiefly made more difficult by the impossibility of proving the existence of the *intert* (*dolus directus*) as a precondition *sine qua non*. It seems that in the framework of these discussions the specific phenomenon of selective elimination of elite segments of the local non-Serb communities in the period April - September, 1992, established as a fact by the majority of authors who dealt with or are dealing with the war in Bosnia and Hercegovina, has been unjustly neglected although precisely this aspect offers a potential series of answers to the aim and purpose of the war actions and bloodshed carried out over the civilian population.²

The reason for the scientific marginalization of this specific form of systematic crime is first of all the lack of the theoretical framework within which *elitocide* could be practically researched and analytically evaluated. Contrary to genocide, *elitocide* is a notion that has been exceptionally rarely used in professional and scientific terminology, primarily for its great vagueness, i.e. the nonexistence of solid scientific codification. Etymologically, *elitocide* comprises two terms: French word *elite* (chosen, leaders) and Latin noun *occidio* (total extermination). Therefore, *elitocide* could be defined as a systematic elimination of leading and prominent figures of a society or a group.

It is symptomatic that scholars use the word *elitocide* as a semantic self-explanatory term, something that bears its meaning in itself, without the structural elaboration or systematization of that meaning within the science of genocide, to which this sociological phenomenon is tightly related.

The basic problem of the scientific-theoretic vagueness and unclear content of *elitocide* is the lack, i.e. a non-systematization of those characteristics on the basis of which this crime as a complex notion could be identified and analyzed in reality. The need to construct a comprehensive but at the same time determinative

* Translated by Mario Bezbradica

and practically applicable definition of *elitocide* as well as its accompanying theoretical framework is, namely, a precondition of its research and evaluation "on the ground". Generally it can be said that *elitocide* is notionally marked in science only in the framework of the analysis of the carrying out of certain crimes of genocide, and, in principle, as one of the preparatory phases of genocide³, although mass crimes of elitocidal character can be traced outside of the genocide actions.⁴ In the analysis and classification of elitocidal activities in Bosnia and Hercegovina Mark Danner went farthest by defining the consequential destroying of the executive political leaders and other members of the Bosniak elite as one of the fundamental phases of genocide in Bosnia and Hercegovina, and he included such *decapitation of the best* in his outline of the crime of genocide over Bosniaks.⁵ The expansiveness of meaning of this notion, and with this its vagueness is shown also in its interdisciplinary function. So sociologist Janja Beć uses the term *elitocide* in the context of impoverishment and emigration of the young, educated generations of the Bosnian-Hercegovian population (so called "*brain drain*") what creates a basis for the destroying of the core of every modern European society.⁶

The Definition of Elitocide

It is acceptable and purposeful to define *elitocide* through the prism of the theoretical structure of the socio-legal science of genocide since both notions phenomenologically possess several essential common traits (systematic phases of acts and proceedings, a precondition of the existence of intent) that make them necessarily related. Accordingly, out of the definition of genocide following characteristics of elitocide can be deduced, which simultaneously serve as its identification criteria:

-Elitocide is coherent in time and space, an interdependent process

-Elitocide is characterized through the systematically planned chain of activities

-Elitocide is intentionally committed crime

-Main characteristic of elitocide is the elimination of influence of the elite segments of a group, i.e. deprivation of its power

-Victims of elitocide are such segments of an ethnic, racial, national or religious group

-Primary purpose of elitocide is a creation of such conditions that enable the consequential rule over decapitated target group

Therefore, *elitocide* can be defined as a time-space connected, systematic and intentionally carried out *neutralization* of influence of the elite segments of an ethnic, racial, national or religious group with the purpose of making the rule over those groups possible.

The Purpose of Elitocide in Bosnia and Hercegovina

The crucial question in the phenomenon of *elitocide* is its purpose. It has been said already that elitocidal crimes do not necessarily have to lead to genocide although they largely make it possible. By eliminating the elite segments of a group, a group is being "beheaded" i.e. it is suitable for unconditional governing over it. That still does not indicate, however, what might happen to that group. The spectrum of possibilities is great, i.e. the purpose of elitocide cannot be decidedly asserted, yet it is subjected to analysis from case to case.

What was the purpose of elitocide in Bosnia and Hercegovina? It is indicative that the elite of the Bosniaks and the Croats, especially in eastern and western Bosnia, was neutralized *after* the take-over of the territory and the establishing of the Serb government. With

this the aim to destroy the elite segments of the local non-Serb communities gains broader connotation: if the phase of the takeover of the local government had been finalized *before destroying* higher strata of the local Bosniak or Croatian community, what was then the real aim of elitocide?

The manner and the carrying out of the elitocidal activities in the eastern and western Bosnia indicate from the standpoint of gradual socio-cultural, economical and physical destruction of the Bosniak population that the elitocide in Bosnia and Hercegovina can be characterized as necessarily *genocidal*, i.e. that its aim was to disable the long term revitalization of the survived Bosniak ethnic corpus. While the purpose of elitocide, in terms of tactics, can be assorted in one of the instruments employed for the military disablement of non-Serb local communities, however, strategically it was intended to contribute to the disintegration of the community as such. Namely, by the elimination of "the most capable" and "the best", i.e. cultural, religious, economical and political leaders, "the beheaded" community necessarily disintegrates since its qualitative stratum which keeps it coherent is destroyed. Even more so, by the elimination of representative figures of a society, such a society loses its identity and *disintegrates*. Having in mind the fact that the Bosniak communities of Prijedor, Zvornik or Foča today exist only as groups of politically and socially unarticulated individuals, then the analysis of elitocide as a specific phenomenon of the systematic crimes in Bosnia and Hercegovina can help to confirm and prove their inherent genocidal character.

Precisely for that reason the systematization of elitocide as a sociological phenomenon and a certain type of criminal behavior within genocidal projects has never been more indispensable. The scientific classification of elitocide does not only make the proving and the differentiation of the genocidal and potentially genocidal crimes less difficult, it provides also the basis for the research of

consequences of such activity. The non-existence of the best, the most capable, the most affluent and the most inspired segments of a community conceals both in the times of apparent peace and false well-being the seed of its destruction. It is the task of science among other things to prevent such development, and to make the needed recovery possible for the posterity of the Bosnians and Herzegovinians.

Notes

1 See Kaldor, Mary. *"Neue und alte Kriege"*, Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 2000, p. 84. Compare also the report of the *Human Rights Watch "The Takeover of Bijeljina and Janja"*: "Immediately after the take-over, many Bosniaks were arrested, in particular those with prominent positions, such as businessmen and politicians, and many of them 'disappeared' altogether." *Human Rights Watch, "The Takeover of Bijeljina and Janja"*, p. 3. The report can be read at the web page http://www.hrw.org/reports/2000/bosnia/Bosn005-03.htm#P294_47864.

2 It is symptomatic that the term elitocide in the last several years is increasingly used by authors whose works primarily treat the war in Bosnia and Hercegovina. Some of them are the most eminent names and already standardized reference for the research of conflict in the regions of the former Yugoslavia such as Ken Booth, Laura Silber, Alan Little, Norman Cigar, Norman Naimark, Michael Sells or James Gow.

3 In the framework of the science of genocide the term elitocide was for the first time used by Leo Kuper in 1981 in his book *"Genocide: Its Political Use in the 20th Century"*. Kuper uses elitocide to describe one of the first phases within genocide which is the destruction of the educated segment of a racial or ethnic group. See Kuper, Leo. *"Genocide. Its Political Use in the Twentieth Century"*, London: Penguin Books, 1981, p. 32.

4 So the massacre committed over the Assyrian clergy in 448 BC could be defined as elitocide. More recent example of elitocidal crimes that have not been committed with the purpose of carrying out genocide is for instance the shooting of 21, 000 Polish officers in Katyn in 1940, as well as the ordered elimination of the military staff ("Kommissarbefehl") as a part of the operation "Barbarossa" in 1941. See Madayczyk, Czeslaw. *"Das Drama von Katyn"*, Berlin: Dietz, 1991. See also Zentner, Christian. *"Der Kriegausbruch 1. September 1939"*, Frankfurt am Main: Verlag Ullstein, 1979, p. 216 and 228. The

content of the "commissary order" can be read at the web page <http://www.ns-archiv.de/krieg/1941/kommissarbefehl.php>.

5 Danner, Mark. *Endgame in Kosovo*, New York: New York Review of Books, Volume 46, No. 8, May 6, 1999. Compare also McCloskey, Frank. *The US is Appeasing Fascism and Genocide*, Los Angeles: The Christian Science Monitor Publishing Society, 1992, p. 1, at: <http://www.b.-info.com/places/Macedonia/republic/news/201-300/283.3,l>, also Sells, A. Michael. *The Bridge Betrayed: Religion and Genocide in Bosnia*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996, p. 35 and p. 20. See also Gow, James. *The Serbian Project and its Adversaries*, London: Hurst&Company, 2003, p. 130, 135.

6 Beč, Janja. *Archipelago Atlantis*, Sarajevo: Buybook, 2004, p. 51.