

Global Genocides

Assignment 1: Primary Source Analysis

Critical Analysis of the Testimony of Witness DD

Before I start this analysis, I firstly need to explain who the following were/are, so as to give a background. In this analysis I shall use their abbreviations, by which they are known.

UNPROFOR, this is the United Nations Protection Force, which can also be known by its French acronym FORPRONU, Force des Nations Unies. This was the first UN peacekeeping force in Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina during the Yugoslav wars. The mandate of the UNPROFOR's is to ensure that UNPA's (United Nations Protected Areas) are demilitarised, either through withdrawal or the disbandment of all the armed forces within them, and then to ensure that all persons residing in these areas are fully protected from the fear of armed attack.(Peacekeeping.un.org,2025)

ICTY, this is the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia. This was a United Nations court of law, which was set up to deal with the war crimes, that took place during the conflicts in the Balkans during the 1990's.(www.icty.org,2025)

The testimony of Witness DD given before the ICTY in the case IT-98-33-T, dated 25th July 2000, provides an powerful and harrowing firsthand account of the genocide in Srebrenica in July 1995. This document is just so much more than just a piece of legal evidence, it is also a deeply personal and exposing account of the systematic violence, the forced displacement, and the mass killings of the Bosniak (Bosnian Muslims), during the Bosnian war between 1992 and 1995. In this analysis, I aim to look at and to examine the context of the testimony, its intended audience, along with the themes and implications of the content, and then look at the strengths and weaknesses of us using such testimonies as an historical source, especially considering the five year gap between the events it describes, to its presentation in court. I also aim to consider how the testimony aligns with scholars perspectives and works on genocide, in particular those views of Helen Fein, Raphael Lemkin, Paul Miller, Eric Weitz and William Schabas, along with the views of the United Nations.

This testimony was given by an anonymous witness, who is only identified to us as "Witness DD", we do however know that they are a Muslim woman born in the Srebrenica municipality in 1954. We should take note of the importance of the anonymity of the witness ,which is a crucial aspect of this source. I feel that this reflects the continuing danger and trauma, that survivors of genocide feel and experience. Witness DD presented her testimony as part of the ICTY's prosecution of individuals, who were found responsible for war crimes committed during the Bosnian War. It is worth remembering that between 7,000 and 8,000 Bosniak men and boys were massacred in the 3 years of the war (icty.org,2025), which was central to the tribunals work. The Bosnian war of 1992-1995, claimed the lifes of between 25,000 and 30,000 Bosniaks,Bosnian Croats and other non Serbs, there was also mass displacement and widespread genocidal sexual violence. This testimony is vital for understanding the massacre's impact, not only at the

time, but also continuing. We must understand the importance and significance of such testimonies, which are given in a legal setting, where truthfulness and reliability are of the utmost paramount importance.

We should recognise the significance of the five year gap between the genocide and the delivery of the testimony. Schabas, in his book, *Unimaginable Atrocities*, states that while immediate testimonies capture the raw emotions, testimonies given later will give a more reflective perspective. (Schabas, 2015). Witness DD's account of 2000, is influenced by her heartbreaking losses, especially those of a mother losing her child, trauma and guilt of survival and the intervening years of political discussion. Weitz in his book, *A Century of Genocide* states that whilst survivor testimonies are essential, it is important that they are assessed within their historical and political contexts. (Weitz, 2003). The time between events though can provide survivors with an emotional distance which helps with them being able to express their experiences in a more coherent way.

Even though the main audience for this testimony were the legal professionals and judges at the ICTY, who were tasked with the role of determining whether or not the accused were guilty, it also extends to a far wider audience, including historians, human rights activist, policymakers and the broader public. It shapes the international awareness and recognition of not only the Srebrenica massacre as a genocide, but also other massacres which can be seen as genocide also. The ICTY thoroughly vetted all testimonies as to ensure their validity. Witness DD's testimony plays a vital role not only in reinforcing the historical record, but she also counters the deniers narratives.

With this testimony, we see how Witness DD vividly describes the pure terror that the civilians were faced with in Srebrenica. She recalls the shells falling, houses shaking and the fear that engulfed the population, focusing in on the extreme fear felt by her own children, whilst running away from it. We are able to understand the psychological impact in the way she describes her son's reaction to separation. We share the total devastation of her being separated from her husband and especially her son, we see the deep scars left psychologically by the genocide. These are scars that will never heal. Weitz's view is that genocidal regimes install fear as a tool of systematic destruction, not only targeting individuals but dismantling whole communities. (Weitz, 2003).

I find that the major theme of this testimony by Witness DD, is the failure of the UNPROFOR. She describes how the people of Srebrenica trusted the UN peacekeepers to protect them, which of course was totally understandable, as that was their job and role there. However the Dutch peacekeepers in Potocari made not attempt to intervene and protect the civilians, this led to the mass killings. Helen Fein has examined how international actors are often seen to fail in preventing genocide. (Fein, 1988). The testimony from Witness DD, highlights the accountability of the UN, with its broken promises and international inaction. Schabas in *Unimaginable Atrocities*, argues that legal frameworks alone can't prevent mass killings without political will and effective intervention mechanisms. (Schabas, 2015).

For me one of the most heartbreaking parts of Witness DD's testimony is that of the forced separation of families. We know that the Bosnian Serb forces would systematically execute men and boys and would subject the women to forced displacement and in many many cases sexual violence. Witness DD's account of her son being taken from her, is similar to the account of thousands of others from Srebrenica. Weitz, discusses how

genocide often includes gendered violence, with the men being seen as threats and the women are targeted, with the aim to destroy the social fabric of a group,(Weitz, 2003), leaving them with the lifelong trauma of witnessing their loved ones being taken away, never to be heard of, or seen again. Although rape and forced displacement were and are recognised as war crimes, their prosecution remains secondary to mass killings. Schabas has highlighted that international law has historically struggled to address gender based atrocities within the genocide framework. (Schabas,2015) . However, the testimony of Witness DD has provided essential documentation of these crimes and will hopefully help push for greater legal recognition of gendered violence in the settings of conflict, now and in the future.

This testimony is obviously a deeply personal one and for that, it does not provide a political or military analysis of the Srebrenica genocide. Witness DD also does not give a detailed description of the perpetrators apart from calling them “ their soldiers”. This is obviously understandable, given the amount of distress, but it does mean however, that in order to gain a fuller understanding, her testimony must be combined with other sources. Witness DD’s testimony can be seen as just one piece of a puzzle, that when joined with lots of other pieces, from official documents, military documents, forensic evidence etc, will then give a full and clearer picture.

We see this testimony as a legal one and it belongs to the genre that emphasises factual recounting over interpretation. These legal testimonies are formed and structured through questioning, with the aim to establishing events relevant to criminal responsibility. Due to the fact that it is subject to legal scrutiny and cross examination, it is considered to be highly reliable. We need to keep in mind though that trauma can affect memory. Schabas states that , memory is not static. (Schabas, 2015).Survivors will remember events differently, they may recall only part or focus only on specific moments. The passage of time will also affect reliability, our memories may fade or we may choose to block out certain events. But, the emotional truth of their experiences will remain constant. Witness DD will not have a complete and clear view of what happened to her husband and son, but other testimonies will help confirm and add to her understanding of what happened. Miller in *Contested Memories* says that political narratives also influence the memory. (Miller, 2006).

So we therefore again see, that historians need to compare all different types of sources, to enable us to see the broader picture. Witness DD’s testimony is however a highly credible and important piece of evidence.

I wanted to just look at how this testimony compares with existing scholarship on genocide.

Raphael Lemkin’s definition of genocide includes not only the physical destruction of a group, but also includes the systematic dismantling of its social structures. (facing history.org,2025). We can see this definition in the account by Witness DD, as she describes not only the destruction of her family, but also the destruction of her home and community.

Helen Fein’s sociological analysis of genocide, argues that it often involves the dehumanisation of victims and the complicity of bystanders.(Fein, 1988). Witness DD’s testimony clearly illustrates both of these, firstly she tells of the perpetrators systematically killing Bosniaks and secondly how the international community, UN peacekeepers in the first instance and then the wider community failed to intervene. The United Nations Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of Crime of Genocide (1948) also defines genocide as acts which are committed, with the intent to destroy a national, ethnic, racial, or religious groups, to include the killing of members of the group,

causing serious bodily or mental harm.(un.org,2025). We can clearly again see that the testimony of Witness DD meets these criteria.

In conclusion,Witness DD and her testimony give us a crucial account of the genocide that took place in Srebrenica, in the 3 years between 1992 and 1995. It provides us with a deeply personal and emotional account, that clearly highlights the true horrors of genocide, the failure of international protection, and the long-term and possibly life-long psychological consequences for the survivors. Whilst we understand that this testimony and others like it, must be supplemented with additional historical and forensic evidence, they remain a vital source that humanises the mere statistics and legal arguments, that surround genocide. As I have tried to confirm, this testimony and other like it support scholarly conclusions concerning genocide and underscores the the need for the continued recognition and justice, not only for the victims of Srebrenica, but for the victims of genocide in all others countries. I feel that the five year gap between the genocide occurring and the delivery of the testimony, gave time for reflection influencing both Witness DD 's perspective and the tribunals ability to analyse the events. This testimony of Witness DD stands as a powerful reminder of the atrocities of Srebrenica and the continuing ongoing struggle for justice and remembrance.

Survivors testimonies we have seen, are vital for preserving historical memories, however the main lesson should be that they should prevent further atrocities occurring. They should act as a reminder to the world, what the consequences are of hate, discrimination and inaction. By listening, taking note and sharing these testimonies, societies can and should work towards justice and reconciliation. Sadly, the atrocities that are being allowed to happen, by the world, to the people of Gaza, perhaps shows that very little has been learnt. We continue to instate Presidents, who preach and incite, hate and discrimination, installing fear into many. The world, as a whole needs to remember and learn from the past and not continue to allow the same mistakes to happen again and again.

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