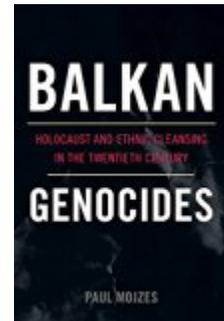


Paul Mojzes. *Balkan Genocides: Holocaust and Ethnic Cleansing in the Twentieth Century*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2011. 316 S. ISBN 978-1-4422-0663-2; ISBN 978-1-4422-0665-6.

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## P. Mojzes: Balkan Genocides

In the work under review, author Paul Mojzes tests the application of the terms ‘genocide’, ‘ethnic cleansing’, and ‘holocaust’ to the twentieth-century history of South-eastern Europe. Mojzes, like many observers before him, is concerned about what he sees as the propensity for mass violence in the region in question, ‘if there were “bragging rights” for being a genocidal and ethnic cleansing area, the Balkans could claim championship status’, says Mojzes (p. 1). He looks for evidence of genocide and ethnic cleansing during the period of the Balkan wars at the beginning of the twentieth century (1912–1913) the Second World War (1941–1945), and the wars that followed the break-up of Yugoslavia at the end of the twentieth-century (1991–1999).

The first chapter sets out definitions of the key terms, ‘genocide’, ‘ethnic cleansing’, and the relationship between the two. Mojzes’s definitions are fairly uncontroversial: genocide differs from ethnic cleansing in so far as the intent is removal of a population through its destruction, ethnic cleansing bleeds into genocide in more severe cases, etc. In chapter two, ‘The Heritage of Horrors’, Mojzes traces the ancient and pre-modern roots of twentieth century mass violence: the legacy of Byzantine violence in the eleventh century (p. 20), the Habsburg and Ottoman wars of the early modern period. This is relevant to Mojzes because ‘People in the Balkans have long memories of gruesome events that serve as reminders of the need for revenge’ (p. 20). Chapter three covers the Balkan wars of 1912–1913, which Mojzes refers to as ‘An Unrecognized Genocide’ against Muslims and Christians. It is unrecognized partly because the term genocide had

not yet been coined at the term of its commission (p. 25). This is true, but no less true of, say, the Holocaust itself. Strangely, the violence of the First World War, surely connected to that of the Balkan wars, is treated only cursorily, as an ‘epilogue’ to the conflicts of 1912–1913, or perhaps their sequel. Chapters four, five, and six cover the ‘Multiple Genocides’ of the Second World War, the crimes of the Ustasha regime in the Independent State of Croatia; atrocities committed in Axis-occupied Serbia; and in Bulgaria and Macedonia. Chapter seven deals with violence against ethnic Germans in Yugoslavia at the end of the Second World War; controversially, and very questionably, Mojzes deems this violence evidence of a ‘Retaliatory Genocide’. Chapters eight, nine, ten, and eleven deal with the violence of the 1990s in Croatia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, and in Kosovo. And there is finally a chapter on International Criminal Tribunal for Yugoslavia (ICTY).

To be sure, this is an important and worthwhile project, but its successful execution would require a thorough reading of both the cutting edge of genocide and holocaust research and of violence in the history of the region in the twentieth century. This book comes up short on both accounts, and it is therefore full of eccentric and unconvincing arguments. For example, when talking about a ‘lack of consensus’ over violence at Jasenovac (pp. 18–19), the Ustasha death camp, Mojzes cites the differences in interpretation between Milan Bulajić, the former director of the Museum of the Victims of Genocide in Belgrade, and, on the other hand, Dinko Šakić, the former commander of the camp at Jasenovac

(!). These are hardly figures in the mainstream of scholarly research on Ustasha violence, a mainstream which acknowledges the fact that genocide against Jews, Roma, and Serbs took place in the Independent State of Croatia during the Second World War. Later on, the undocumented tale that the Ustashe intended to 'kill a third, expel and third, convert a third' of the Serbs living in the Independent State of Croatia (NDH) is reproduced without source (p. 52). Then, a programmatic statement by the Chetnik leader Dragoljub 'Draža' Mihailović is attributed to an article on 'Serbian War Crimes' at the online encyclopaedia Wikipedia (p. 97). Are sources such as this, and Bulajić and Šakić, likely to dispel the myths and misconceptions of which Mojzes complains, or will the perpetuate them? Chapter eight, an introduction to some of the 'contentious analytical issues' surrounding the Yugoslav wars of the 1990s, offers up in fact a series of misdiagnoses of the problems in scholarship of the wars, followed by Mojzes's own nostrums. Would even a first year undergraduate module set such questions as 'Were the reasons [for the wars] complex or simple?'; 'Were the wars caused by ancient hatreds or by the contemporary ambitions of leaders?' (p. 137); 'Were the wars caused by an intra-Yugoslav crisis or by foreign meddling?' (p. 142).

Mojzes finds a proliferation of genocidal activity throughout the twentieth century. And, according to him, these spells of violence reveal the true face of the region and its peoples in the twentieth century: that is, violent, atavistic, its inhabitants out for bloody revenge on their neighbours for crimes committed centuries ago. The far longer and more frequent periods of peace in the region are due to the 'repression' by 'totalitarian' regimes of these ever-present urges towards violence. Mojzes is quite open in his avocation of the 'ancient hatreds' interpretation of Balkan violence. Thus, at the beginning of the 1990s, in Croatia, 'the Krajina Serbs revolted angrily and impulsively, as they had a military tradition –

nurtured by their conflicts with the Turks [sic] and the Hapsburgs [sic] – that conflicted with those of the Croats living around them' (p. 158–159). 'Impulsively' is the giveaway, for the behaviour of the Krajina Serbs in the months before the outbreak of war in Croatia was not at all impulsive, nor did it have anything to do with 'Turks' or 'Hapsburgs': it was largely the result of a state-run media campaign in Belgrade that sought to manipulate the Croatian Serbs for political ends. Frequently, that campaign drew upon spurious stories of long-term enmities between Croats and Serbs and of the resurgence of past genocides and atrocities. Mojzes could not be more wrong in his conclusions: violence was not 'repressed' in the Balkans in the twentieth century, it was inflamed: the author has failed to see how violent and genocidal entrepreneurs and activists – of all political bent and from wherever they hail – will stoke up nightmarish visions of primordial violence and cyclical hostilities in order to mobilize broader support for their projects. Thus, the Chetnik guerrillas who committed atrocities against Muslim civilians during the Balkan wars also propagandized amongst the Christian population, telling exaggerated stories of the oriental savagery and cruelty of the Turks throughout history. The Ustashe bombarded its citizens with stories of the crimes of Serbian hegemony in the interwar Yugoslavia and of Judeo-Masonic conspiracies, all of which were intended to shore up support for their programme of genocide (where recent research has shown that support was in many cases lacking). And, as Chip Gagnon has shown *Chip Gagnon, The Myth of Ethnic War: Serbia and Croatia in the 1990s*, Ithaca 2004. , Slobodan Milošević sought to convince Serbs that Franjo Tuđman's Croatia was simply the restoration of the Ustasha state of the Second World War, and that the fate of Serbs in it would be the same. These are myths which Mojzes has reified and presented as explanatory factors in the history of violence in the region during the twentieth century. His conclusions are thus frequently less than convincing.

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