

Archives as facilitator of dialogue: How can archives contribute to dealing with past.

On 25th May 1993 the UN Security Council passed a resolution 827 formally establishing The International Criminal Tribunal for former Yugoslavia.¹ This was the first ever-criminal tribunal established by the UN and the first criminal tribunal since Nuremberg and Tokyo tribunals. Testimonies about inhuman treatments, rapes, mass executions, detention facilities known also as death camps echoed in western media creating an atmosphere that led to the establishment of the Tribunal for ex-Yugoslavia. As the Secretary General said at the Closing Ceremony for the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia: (the Tribunal) *“emerged as a result of the dedicated efforts of specific individuals, certain feelings of shame, and a unique geopolitical environment. As an instrument “to counter ‘an erasing’ of ‘the past’”.*²

While following its defined Mandate the Tribunal went beyond traditional understanding of criminal trials aimed not just to establish facts on what has happened and punish those responsible but to explain the historical background of the conflict and foster the reconciliation process. After 25 Years of existence, the Tribunal closed 2017.

There is no doubt that the Tribunal contributed the fight against impunity and played an important role in international law by widening the understanding of crimes against humanity, systematic rapes, ethnic cleansing and genocide. From the other side answering to two main questions “how it happened and why?” was important not only for those who survived but also for those killed while testimonies will be stored in archives and museum building so a memorial for their suffering. This symbolic memorial is currently silent, waiting to tell details of the Bosnian war to researchers, artists, activists and everyone seeking to understand what has happened and how.

The Tribunal produced more than 2 million pages of documentation during the trials. Around 4650 Witnesses testified in front of the international community and global audience. Out of this testimonies 2,5 million pages of Transcripts were produced. Each trial created a unique database of documentation, which is today accessible to everyone interested to understand the war in Bosnia.

By looking back into 25 years of the Tribunal's work and the colossal collection of documents, some questions remain.

1. To what extent is the aim of contributing to the reconciliation process achieved, especially in local communities most hit by war crimes.
2. What is the potential of Digital Records, Archives and Documents for fostering dialogue on the past for building sustainable Peace?

¹¹ Further referred as Tribunal

² Secretary-General's remarks at Closing Ceremony for the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia, 21 December 2017, available at <<https://www.un.org/sg/en/content/sg/statement/2017-12-21/secretary-generals-remarks-closing-ceremony-international-criminal>> accessed 21 October 2019.

Moreover, our research was guided with the idea to examine potentials of using archival material for peacebuilding efforts in Bosnia and Herzegovina. By looking closer to emerging and existing initiatives, this research aimed to look into emerging local grass root initiatives that aim to contra balance institutionalized denial of war crimes while creating a space for research and dialogue about the past for future generations. Concretely we were looking into the potential of emerging local archive initiatives such as the Prijedor Archive Project and its role in facilitating dialogue in communities who have faced mass violations of human rights in the past.

The Prijedor Archive Project has been launched 2015 as a grass root initiative by local organization and individuals. This was a unique combination of a victim centric (Women Assotiation Izvor) and a youth and human right centric organization (Center for youth Kwart). The Prijedor Archive is envisioned as open space for dialogue and research. Until now a methodological framework for the future archive is drafted, documents from the ICTY trials have been downloaded and collected, communication with relevant organization in the region has been established for example with: Documenta (Center for Dealing with Past in Zagreb), Humanitarian Law Center in Belgrade and the Jasenovac Memorial Center in Jasenovac.

By looking closer into the OSA collections consisting of journalist reports, official government communications, reports on human right abuses, forced migration and missing persons we were seeking materials for creating a greater understanding of the scope of crimes committed in Prijedor. Our focus was on early testimonies, news reports and articles with the aim to find mentioning of “White ribbons”. The white ribbons are referring to an act from 31 May 1992 when the non-Serb population of Prijedor was been ordered to mark themselves with white ribbons when leaving their houses. From a symbol of discrimination and dehumanization, the white ribbons have become a symbol of fight against war crime denial and the right for using public space in commemorating innocent victims such as children in Prijedor.

In general, there are rare mentioning of White Ribbons in official Documents. White ribbons are appearing in early testimonies and are recorded in the official Report of the UN Commission for investigating war crimes in Formal Yugoslavia but without referring on specific Names as source. In the OSA we have found a mentioning of the White Ribbons from Jadranka Cegelj³, a women who was detained in the Omarska Camp.

Overview of Consulted Material

Signature	Series or Content description
304-0-3:7	HU OSA 304-0-3 Records of the International Human Rights Law Institute Relating to the Conflict in the Former Yugoslavia: Numbered Commission Document Files ("Bates File")
304-0-3:8	HU OSA 304-0-3 Records of the International Human Rights Law Institute Relating to the Conflict in the Former Yugoslavia: Numbered Commission Document Files ("Bates File")

³ 304-0-3 Box 47 AV Video Index on War Crimes in the Former Yugoslavia prepared by : Tracy Burns (Media Coordinator) for the Commission of Experts Established Pursuant to Security Council Resolution 780 (1992) accessed on the 20th September 2022

304-0-3:1	HU OSA 304-0-3 Records of the International Human Rights Law Institute Relating to the Conflict in the Former Yugoslavia: Numbered Commission Document Files ("Bates File")
205-4-90:24	HU OSA 205-4-90 Records of the Open Media Research Institute: Information Services Department: Bosnia Herzegovina Subject Files
309-0-2:1	HU OSA 309-0-2 Monitoring of Television from Bosnia and Herzegovina: Off-Air Recordings of Television News and Other Political Programs
205-4-91:1	HU OSA 205-4-91 Records of the Open Media Research Institute: Information Services Department: Sarajevo Press Review
300-120-5	HU OSA 300-120 Western Press Archives
363-0-3	HU OSA 363 Records of the American Refugee Committee's Balkan Programs
304-0-12	Records of the International Human Rights Law Institute Relating to the Conflict in the Former Yugoslavia (Press Reports on War in Bosnia)
304-0-15	HU OSA 304-0-15 Transcripts and Summary of the Video Cassettes on War Crimes in the Former Yugoslavia (Transcripts and Summary of the Video Cassettes on War Crimes in the Former Yugoslavia)
350-1-1	HU OSA 350 Records of the International Monitor Institute (Europe)
304-0-16:128/1	HU OSA 304-0-16 Video Recordings Relating to the Conflict in the Former Yugoslavia
304-0-15	HU OSA 304-0-15 Transcripts and Summary of the Video Cassettes on War Crimes in the Former Yugoslavia
300-120-5:24	HU OSA 300-120-5 Records of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty Research Institute: Western Press Archives: Country Files
363-0-3:1	HU OSA 363-0-3 Records of the American Refugee Committee's Balkan Chapter: Photographs and Slides
363-0-3:2	HU OSA 363-0-3 Records of the American Refugee Committee's Balkan Chapter: Photographs and Slides
304-0-12:1	HU OSA 304-0-12 Records of the International Human Rights Law Institute Relating to the Conflict in the Former Yugoslavia: Press Reports on War in Bosnia
304-0-15:1	HU OSA 304-0-15 Records of the International Human Rights Law Institute Relating to the Conflict in the Former Yugoslavia: Transcripts and Summary of the Video Cassettes on War Crimes in the Former Yugoslavia (Bosnia: The Hidden Horrors 1/2)
304-0-15:2/1	HU OSA 304-0-15 Records of the International Human Rights Law Institute Relating to the Conflict in the Former Yugoslavia: Transcripts and Summary of the Video Cassettes on War Crimes in the Former Yugoslavia (Omarska's White House)
304-0-15:3/10	HU OSA 304-0-15 Records of the International Human Rights Law Institute Relating to the Conflict in the Former Yugoslavia: Transcripts and Summary of the Video Cassettes on War Crimes in the Former Yugoslavia (Press Conference: Report From UN War Crimes Commission)
304-0-15:1/16	HU OSA 304-0-15 Records of the International Human Rights Law Institute Relating to the Conflict in the Former Yugoslavia: Transcripts and Summary of the Video Cassettes on War Crimes in the Former Yugoslavia (A Town Called Kozarac)

304-0-15:3/18	HU OSA 304-0-15 Records of the International Human Rights Law Institute Relating to the Conflict in the Former Yugoslavia: Transcripts and Summary of the Video Cassettes on War Crimes in the Former Yugoslavia (Fascism 92)
304-0-15:5/16	HU OSA 304-0-15 Records of the International Human Rights Law Institute Relating to the Conflict in the Former Yugoslavia: Transcripts and Summary of the Video Cassettes on War Crimes in the Former Yugoslavia (Reports from Channel 2 in 1992 and 1993)
304-0-15:5/20	HU OSA 304-0-15 Records of the International Human Rights Law Institute Relating to the Conflict in the Former Yugoslavia: Transcripts and Summary of the Video Cassettes on War Crimes in the Former Yugoslavia (War Victims: A Time to Mourn Part 1)
304-0-15:6/4	HU OSA 304-0-15 Records of the International Human Rights Law Institute Relating to the Conflict in the Former Yugoslavia: Transcripts and Summary of the Video Cassettes on War Crimes in the Former Yugoslavia (ITN News Report)
350-1-1:248/1	HU OSA 350 Records of the International Monitor Institute (HU OSA 350-1-1 Balkan Archive)
304-0-16:135/1	HU OSA 304-0-16 Records of the International Human Rights Law Institute Relating to the Conflict in the Former Yugoslavia: Video Recordings Relating to the Conflict in the Former Yugoslavia
304-0-16:157/1	HU OSA 304 Records of the International Human Rights Law Institute Relating to the Conflict in the Former Yugoslavia (HU OSA 304-0-16 Video Recordings Relating to the Conflict in the Former Yugoslavia)

Instead of an conclusion

Having in mind that the research stay was marked by the question: “How can Archives contribute to constructive Dealing with Past process” here are some General Learning insights gained during the stay at Open Society Archive:

1. An Archive lives when it is used.

As the historian, Iva Vukusic wrote:

“(...) the archives are key: they must be made as accessible as possible. Maybe harmony and shared histories are impossible to reach between different communities in the region, but what we can and should expect is a fact-based discussion about the past, and trying to hear each other with an intent to understand, and not to blame.”⁴

By representing an initiative from which emerged from the community for the community the Prijedor Archive Project has the potential to facilitate dialogue on the violent past in the frame of the local community.

2. An Archive lives when it is able to establish innovative forms of cooperation with individuals and other institutions.

⁴ Iva Vukusic, 'Assessing the ICTY's legacy' <https://justicehub.org/article/assessing-the-ictys-legacy//> accessed 9 Sept. 2022.

Like the OSA an archive should not be frozen in Time. It should work in actively collection and acquiring important collection and documents. This important lesson will guide further work in establishing an Archive in Prijedor.

3. Archive may contribute to building peace after mass atrocities as a part of bigger network

For the Prijedor Archive it is important to establish cooperation with similar institutions and gain trust within the local community.