

# Kent Academic Repository

## Full text document (pdf)

### Citation for published version

Henig, David (2017) Prayer as a History: Of Witnesses, Martyrs, and Plural Pasts in Postwar Bosnia-Herzegovina. *Social Analysis*, 61 (1). pp. 41-54. ISSN 0155-977X.

### DOI

<https://doi.org/10.3167/sa.2017.610103>

### Link to record in KAR

<https://kar.kent.ac.uk/49163/>

### Document Version

Author's Accepted Manuscript

#### Copyright & reuse

Content in the Kent Academic Repository is made available for research purposes. Unless otherwise stated all content is protected by copyright and in the absence of an open licence (eg Creative Commons), permissions for further reuse of content should be sought from the publisher, author or other copyright holder.

#### Versions of research

The version in the Kent Academic Repository may differ from the final published version.

Users are advised to check <http://kar.kent.ac.uk> for the status of the paper. **Users should always cite the published version of record.**

#### Enquiries

For any further enquiries regarding the licence status of this document, please contact:

[researchsupport@kent.ac.uk](mailto:researchsupport@kent.ac.uk)

If you believe this document infringes copyright then please contact the KAR admin team with the take-down information provided at <http://kar.kent.ac.uk/contact.html>

# **Prayer as a History: Of Witnesses, Martyrs, and Plural Pasts in Postwar Bosnia-Herzegovina**

David Henig  
School of Anthropology and Conservation  
University of Kent  
Canterbury CT2 7NR  
[d.henig@kent.ac.uk](mailto:d.henig@kent.ac.uk)

## **Abstract:**

This paper explores how Muslims in Central Bosnia engage with the violent past, through acts of prayer, to make history. It traces two idioms articulated in prayers whereby Bosnian Muslims affectively apprehend, remember and temporalise the past: witness (*šahit*) and martyr (*šehit*). The two idioms, I argue, afford Muslims to reanimate recent critical events as the realms of personal moral-cum-temporal orientations rather than unreflectively partaking in an ongoing nationalisation of the past in the public discourses. This paper thus suggests to take seriously an act of prayer as a mode of historical consciousness – an assemblage of divergent sensibilities, materialities, practices and ethical conduct – in order to develop a more nuanced perspective on the past as actively and ethically in-the-making in the present.

**Key words:** Bosnia-Herzegovina, Critical Events, Historical Consciousness, Islam, Martyrdom, Past and Present, Prayer, Violence

**Word count** (excluding title, abstract and key words): 6,197

## Prayer as a History

‘And at the end, one more prayer for Ottoman martyrs and for Bosniak martyrs’, said the imam to the assembly of male Muslims who had gathered for one of the annual outdoor rain prayer feasts in the Central Bosnian highlands, in the summer of 2009. ‘You are witnessing’, the imam continued, ‘by your prayers, by your presence here at this place, the history and continuity of Bosniaks in this region. You are witnessing and confirming our tradition that was sustained despite all the attempts to silence us’.

The very place of outdoor prayers (*dovište*), which the imam intertwined with a grand national narrative of the Bosnian war, suffering and survival in his speech, is nestled in the verdant foothills of the Zvijezda highlands, a historically significant Muslim area in Central Bosnia. The prayer site itself has an enormous old lime tree instead of a mihrab in its centre, facing in the direction of Mecca, and a cluster of old graves of unknown Ottoman soldiers to the rear, recognised in the vernacular as *šehitluci* – a burial site for Muslim martyrs. These graves are venerated by individual Muslims living in the vicinage, or further afield, during the year, in order to pray for the souls of the dead, and access divine blessing (*beričet*). For village Muslims, praying for the souls of the dead is a moment of remembrance as well as an act of vital exchange. Translated into the language of prayer economy, praying at a grave for the souls of the dead is an act that earns good deeds. The person receives in return fortune and blessing for the living. Thus, there is a perpetual exchange of blessings and prayers on the sacred sites that maintains vital relations between the past and the present (Henig n.d.). In turn, the recent war events have also been absorbed into the prayer economy of vital exchange, and have become part of the local histories.

This paper is an exercise in the ethnography of history (Hirsch and Stewart 2005; Lambek 2002), specifically focusing on how Bosnian Muslims, living in the historical imperial frontiers of the Ottoman and the Austro-Hungarian empires, make and experience history. An ethnography of history is understood here as ‘the variety of modes in which people learn about and represent the past’ (Stewart 2012: 7), which goes beyond linearised accounts of historical imagination and consciousness. One such attempt has been offered by Charles Stewart himself, based on his fieldwork in Naxos, Greece. For Naxos islanders, as Stewart (2012) persuasively demonstrates, this is an enduring and widespread dream faculty as a mode of islanders’ engagement with the past. In his recent book, Stewart portrays the Naxos’ dreamscape as an assemblage of the affective sensibilities, materialities, practices and moral-cum-temporal orientations that bundle Naxos islanders’ historical consciousness together.

In Central Bosnia, I argue here, the mode of historical consciousness, whereby village Muslims engage with the past, can be attended to through the very act of prayer as the introductory vignette illustrates. Although the act of prayer is important for Muslims’ individual eschatology (Henkel 2005), it also is oriented towards *the plural pasts*, as a cultural model of engagement with the dead, past events or places. Anthropologists have recognised that prayer is a mode of action with the capacity and efficacy to, ‘invoke’, or ‘engage with’ a multiplicity of agencies, relations, and exchanges (Fortes 1987: 22–36; Mauss [1909] 2003). In his writing on prayer, Marcel Mauss suggests that prayer is a mode of action that ‘is often as rich in ideas and images as a religious narrative’ (Mauss [1909] 2003: 22). We can then modify Mauss’ argument and conceive of prayer as a mode of action that is often as rich in ideas and images as a historical narrative. Therefore, the act of prayer has the capacity to become, topologically speaking, a mode of action that maintains ‘the insistent immanence of plural pasts’ in the present (Argenti, this volume).

The act of prayer as a mode of engagement with the plural pasts reanimates a widely held perspective on issues of post-Ottoman histories, memories, and temporalities, predominantly discussed as being in a fatal embrace with nationalism. Rather unsurprisingly, the prayers remembering Ottoman and Bosniak martyrs has also become an indispensable part of highly nationalised political life in post-war Bosnia-Herzegovina. However, praying for a good afterlife for the souls (*duše*) of the martyrs also continues to be apprehended by Bosnian Muslims as part of the individual ethical conduct of being a good Muslim. Put differently, these moments of remembrance are neither solely politically charged performances of Bosniak ethnonational identity, nor are they just instances of the nationalistic grand narratives that gained significant prominence in the Bosnian political life during and after the end of the 1990s war. The latter often dominates scholarship on post-war Bosnia-Herzegovina, but could be found in other war-torn, post-conflict polities when it comes to questions about the ways people and polities produce knowledge about their violent pasts (cf. Argenti and Schramm 2010). This perspective, labelled as politics of memory (Hacking 1996) reduces the rich texture of historical experiences into one dimension, that of a public political teleological discourse on collective identity and memory. However, as Nicolas Argenti argues in this volume, the great majority of memory literature ignores the immanence of plural pasts in the present. As Argenti puts it, ‘the social fact is not the memory of the past, but its presence’ in multiple instantiations. How can we then attend to such multi-temporalities in the lived human experience ethnographically?

In this paper I take the route of an ethnography of history to explore the nexus of memory politics with grassroots affective sensibilities, materialities, and practices as modalities of engagement with the past. This nexus constitutes and reconstitutes what I describe here heuristically as vernacular histories. Vernacular histories emerge as a nexus in which grand (nationalised) historical narratives, local historical consciousness and personal memories intersect. The nexus of these divergent moral-cum-temporal orientations and modalities of engagement with the plural pasts in the present is embedded in narratives and conversations as much as it is inscribed into the landscape and trees, buildings and ruins, or people’s bodies (Henig 2012). Seen in this light, the highly nationalised public discourses is just one fold in the multilayered *topoi* of the past as it is lived and experienced in the present. Specifically, I focus on two local idioms of historical consciousness, that of witness (*šahit*) and martyr (*šehit*), emerging from the very act of prayer in particular sites of vernacular history. I trace how these idioms have become used more widely as a mode of engagement with more recent violent critical events, thus pluralising the experiences of the pasts in the present.<sup>1</sup> I argue that by tracing vernacular idioms, instantiated in specific moments of human situation, enables us to pinpoint how human actions interact with specific materials and places, and the realms of morality and politics, to become specific modes of moral-cum-temporal orientations towards the plural pasts in the present. It is this tension and negotiation between hegemonic and grand historical narratives, and grass-roots historical consciousness that I want to address in this paper.

### **Framing: ‘The War’ as a Critical Event**

In her writing on the intersections of larger historical circumstances and everyday life, Veena Das coined the term ‘critical events’ (1996, 2007). Critical events, such as the Partition of India and Pakistan in 1947, or the Bosnian war in the 1990s, create a frame of reference for both the stories of

---

<sup>1</sup> For the sake of space, engagement with the more distant Ottoman past could not be discussed here (see Henig 2014).

individual lives as well as the stories of nations or communities. The concept of critical events provides a useful frame to explore how ‘the memory of such events is folded into ongoing relationships’ (Das 2007: 8), and thus how history, framed in critical events, is lived and shapes the present in a multiplicity of ways.

The emergence of prayers for Ottoman and Bosniak martyrs in post-war times, illustrates the play of ‘critical events’ in the historical consciousness of both Bosnian Muslims and in the nationalistic cosmology. The Ottoman past in the *topos* of historical consciousness is not always articulated so clearly in the public discourses in post-war Bosnia-Herzegovina. Yet it intersects during the events of collective prayers such as the prayers for rain, or through personal interactions in search of fortune and blessing with the burial sites for Ottoman martyrs (*šehitluci*), scattered in the landscape. On the other hand, the Second World War and the recent Bosnian war in the 1990s in particular, are vividly articulated during these gatherings and framed as ‘the war’ (*rat*).

However, there is a disjuncture between ‘critical events’ as lived frameworks of reference of past–present relationships and a site of engagement with the past, and their appropriation in nationalist grand narratives and cosmologies (cf. Kapferer 1988).<sup>2</sup> This tension is not uniquely Bosnian (see other essays in this volume). In a similar vein, Michael Herzfeld described the disjuncture between *monumental* and *social time*. Monumental time is the frame of the nation-state based on bureaucratic measures of history – generic, reductive and supreme (Herzfeld 1991: 10). Social time, however, is manifold, affective and embodied – it is the time frame of everyday experience. Herzfeld documents how the nation-state recasts the past in terms of monolithic, chronological and thus teleological – nationalised – present, and creates ‘traditional monuments’, or ‘gatherings’, that often do not conform with everyday experiences, that is, with social time and vernacular histories.

Similarly, for Muslims in post-war Bosnia-Herzegovina, it is the most recent war, epitomised by the Srebrenica massacre, destruction of the bridge in Mostar and the Sarajevo siege, that forms the basis for bureaucratisation and monumentalisation of the past (cf. Hayden 2007; Wagner 2008), including the cult of martyrdom of Bosniaks killed during the conflict (Bougarel 2007). This process of monumentalisation of the past in the present attempts to appropriate narratives of suffering and lost into the grand national narratives and cosmologies. However, the Bosniak politics of memory is not a unanimous process. These attempts to monumentalise critical events of the violent past – of martyrdom for example – resonate as much as provoke anxieties among Bosnian Muslims, who have themselves witnessed the violence and suffering during the war and by participating in the monumentalised critical events. The two local idioms of historical consciousness, that of witness (*šahit*) and martyr (*šehit*), that emerge during acts of prayer and also in the public discourses, thus capture the intricate relationship between ‘monumentalised’ and ‘lived’ critical events that co-create vernacular histories in Muslim Bosnia.

## Beyond Discoursology

---

<sup>2</sup> Following Kapferer’s work (1988) I use ‘cosmology’, rather than ideology, deliberately to study the relations between politics, imagination and action in the context of Bosniak nationalised politics.

During my fieldwork on vernacular Muslim cosmologies in Central Bosnia (since 2008) I could hardly avoid encountering the recent painful memories and atrocities of the 1990s war. ‘The war’ constitutes a significant framework of reference for talking about and reflecting on the past in the present, and on the present.<sup>3</sup> However, as argued above, it would be too easy to see such referential frameworks solely as highly nationalised public reflections and performances on past events. Rather the past is always immanently present in the present in multiple forms.

Indeed, in the municipalities and villages, commemorative monuments have been erected since the end of the war, reminding everyone about the atrocities of the conflict. In every village cemetery there are a number of martyr graves. Since the end of the war countless anniversaries and commemorative events have been launched, organised and institutionalised by the municipalities, cantons or the official Muslim body, the Islamic Community (*Islamska Zajednica*). Critical events have entered the textbooks, TV programmes and radio shows to be reinvoked regularly. In sum, the Bosnian war has been incorporated into Bosniak national cosmologies as the critical event, and has become a constitutive part of memory politics.<sup>4</sup> The war thus became a monumental mode of temporalisation of the past in the present.

Much has been written about how the critical events of the war have been embedded into national discourses on Bosniak collective identity and memory. What is somewhat lacking in these accounts is a more nuanced analysis of the nexus whereby nationalised critical events and vernacular histories co-create historical consciousness; specifically, how these critical events have been embedded into the cultural models and modes of engagement with the plural past in the present through such modes as prayers, holy sites visitations (*zijáret*) or caring for the sacred landscape as a way of making history.

To overcome the discoursology of the monumentalised past I therefore suggest tracing connections and entanglements between multiple forms of engagement with the past – such as politics of memory, nationalistic discourses or individual piety – rather than apprehend these as clearly separated, in order to understand vernacular history in-the-making. The emergence of the cult of martyrdom, and the shifting referential frameworks of the local idioms *šehit* (martyr) and *šahit* (witness) are particularly significant for understanding Bosnian Muslims’ engagements with the plural pasts in the present. For the sake of space I shall briefly discuss only two examples of this process, that of the annual commemorative gathering of the Srebrenica massacre, and the less well-known – but, for Muslims living in the Central Bosnian highlands, equally important – annual gathering Prayer for Martyrs in Solun nearby Olovo municipality.

## **Of Martyrs**

The Srebrenica massacre, during which over 8,000 male Bosniaks were killed in 1995, has become an iconic trope of the violent dissolution of Yugoslavia. It has become a critical event that shapes historical consciousness for a great number of individuals and families, for the grand Bosniak national narratives, collective imagination and monumentalisation of the past. Srebrenica as a place indexes in the Bosniak political cosmology an *axis mundi* of the post-war Bosniak nation, where death, loss and rebirth come together. When thinking of Srebrenica as a past-present frame of

---

<sup>3</sup> Thus, the collapse of the Yugoslav economy and the Federation are related to the critical event of the war; the dysfunctional post-war Federal state or the newly formed post-Dayton cantonal organisational structure; unemployment; privatisation; healthcare, all are consequences of the war in one way or another.

<sup>4</sup> Wagner (2008: 238) gives an illustrative example of Serbian counter-narratives and counter-temporalisation.

reference, it is important to distinguish between the massacre as such, its individual memorialisation and subsequent collective monumentalisation.

In her lucid ethnography of the identification of the Srebrenica missing persons, Sarah Wagner (2008) explored in great detail the aftermath of the massacre. In particular, she analysed the complex entanglement of science, national politics and religious imagination in the processes of identification of the missing persons. Wagner describes the opaqueness of the interval of absence during which a person is missing, meaning neither dead nor alive, and thus for the time being suspended from history. The process of identification of dead bodies, then, is a form of re-temporalisation, bringing the identified persons back to history, and re-framing them in a new political cosmology as Bosniak martyrs.<sup>5</sup> More importantly, Wagner chronicles the Srebrenica memorial service as it developed during the early 2000s, culminating in 2005, on the 10th anniversary of the massacre, and its overall institutionalisation and monumentalisation. She documents *how* and *why* Srebrenica became the most important and most media-covered commemorative event in post-war Bosnia-Herzegovina.

I am sympathetic with her analysis but I would like to move it a step further. Specifically, I am concerned with the relationship between the Srebrenica massacre as a critical event, its cult of martyrs and how these intersect with moral-cum-temporal knowledge about the past in the present outside of the immediate Srebrenica context, here in Central Bosnian highlands. I ask what the memories of the massacre and its monumentalisation *do* to moral-cum-temporal orientations *outside* the memorial site, or to individuals who did not necessarily lose anyone in the massacre, and yet have been encompassed in the grand national narratives of Srebrenica suffering as well, as Bosnian Muslims, and as witnesses of the war.

According to Wagner (2008: 213), the annual commemorative gathering in Srebrenica is not a Muslim pilgrimage, though an inevitable part of the gathering is a collective daily prayer (*namaz*), followed by *dženaza* (Muslim funeral), for newly identified bodies. However, I shall suggest that we should not hurry to draw the lines of separation between commemoration and the act of prayer so quickly. Despite the ongoing monumentalisation of the Srebrenica massacre, the commemorative service and burial of newly identified bodies, the gathering is now leaning towards a pilgrimage for many Bosnian Muslims. Let's look more closely at the very choreography of the gathering. During the commemorative event in 2009, the grand mufti Mustafa Cerić, after his speech, when he was about to start prayers, explained that the prayer will effectively be joined two of the five daily prayers (midday and afternoon prayers) because people in the audience are pilgrims, and that is what a journeying Muslim normally does. Moreover, he kept addressing the audience as 'pilgrims' (*putnici*) throughout the gathering. Furthermore, the date of the event, 11th July, has also been introduced into *Takvim*, which is the official Muslim religious calendar, issued by the Bosnian Islamic Community, and used daily by pious Muslims to decipher exact prayer times, and also for following important dates of feasts and pilgrimages. Thus, the attendees at the annual gathering are not just relatives of the newly identified martyrs. For many Bosnian Muslims to attend the Srebrenica annual gathering is a patriotic performance as much as a pious act in the individual ethical conduct of being a good Muslim. Hence participation in the Srebrenica gathering has become a way for an increasing number of Bosnian Muslims, who did not necessarily lose anyone in the massacre, to relate to this critical

---

<sup>5</sup> For a similar argument on the recovery of missing persons in Cyprus see Sant Cassia 2005. For the involvement of science in fabricating historical consciousness see Stewart 2012: 62. Verdery (1999) describes similar instances of the political lives of dead bodies comparatively.

event of the past in the present, through visiting, pilgrimage, commemoration or prayers for the deceased martyrs.

During my fieldwork in the Central Bosnian highlands, the memorial service on 11<sup>th</sup> July was widely and vigorously discussed by many village Muslims over coffee and neighbourhood visits, as well as during Friday sermons (*džuma*) in the mosques. The local branches of the Islamic Community organised bus trips on that date, usually free of charge. One of the recurring themes in daily conversations was ‘who has already been there’, or ‘I would like to attend at least once in my life’.<sup>6</sup> To ask my friends whether going to Srebrenica was a pious or patriotic act, would not make much sense. So ‘why do you feel so strongly that you should go there?’ I asked my friends Mujo, Ika, Nijas and other villagers. The straightforward reply was ‘I want to pray there for the souls of the martyrs, and thus witness what happened’. And the local way to do engage with the past in the present is to venerate the site and pray.

However, this is not the only way villagers commemorate and relate to critical past events in the present. Let me invoke Veena Das’ argument again. Critical events create a frame of reference for the stories and memories of individual lives, and help to make sense of the shattered world in their aftermath. Indeed, the Srebrenica events were the focus of attention for many days before and after the memorial date. So for example in 2009 I briefly visited the capital, Sarajevo, before the date of Srebrenica massacre. On the way back to the villages I travelled on a bus with a few known faces from the municipality, and when gathering news and gossip without even asking about the upcoming Srebrenica commemorative events, I was told ‘nothing happened, it’s been raining all the time. It will last till Sunday, after the funeral in Srebrenica is over. It’s always been like that, because the sky is crying as well’. When I eventually arrived at the village where I was staying, I was given almost the same explanation, ‘the sky is crying, the rain is Allah’s tears’.

It was not just the weather that resonated and invoked the events of the past in the present. On the commemorative day the village was silent, people stayed in their homes, watching live broadcasting from Srebrenica, and other documentaries and programmes on TV, and the village sawmills did not run. While watching TV programmes about Srebrenica and discussing them, villagers invoked their own recollections and memories of the critical time. At one moment, one of the women in the room, Ika, burst into tears, and started telling an at the time seemingly idiosyncratic story to us, as we were sitting round the table:

‘I was living in a place nearby Kladanj. Many refugees from Srebrenica passed through the village at the time. It was quite common for the buses to stop there, and we brought water and bread for refugees. Sometimes, we took them into the house, to let them have a shower, rest a little bit, eat something. My sister once brought four girls [as she says this, Ika is breathlessly crying]. They were traumatised and in shock, they were stressfully holding each others’ hands, so when my sister offered them a shower they couldn’t because the girls were still holding each other’s hand, that’s how frightened they were, they simply couldn’t. It was so painful for me, I took them to our bedroom, opened the wardrobe and told them “feel free to take any item of clothing”, to make them feel more relaxed. They didn’t take anything, just a little bit of food.’

---

<sup>6</sup> The same argument Muslims use when talking about the hajj pilgrimage.



For Ika, the Srebrenica massacre intersects with the memory of this traumatic moment of witnessing something she could not, and still cannot fully comprehend. Rather than partaking in a monumentalised commemorative service as a mode of invoking the past in the present, for many villagers such as Ika the mode of invoking the critical events is an *affective* and *experiential* one: witnessing rain as Allah's tears, or remembering trembling bodies, four pairs of hands stressfully holding each other, and as a gesture of hospitality to reassure the refugees about shared social intimacy - 'feel free to take any item of clothing' - that remained unheard and haunts Ika in her memories to this day.

In a similar vein, Charles Stewart (2012) and Yael Navaro-Yashin (2012) have shown that there is not necessarily any causality or linearity in linking the past and the present in the production of historical consciousness. What brings the moral-cum-temporal orientations together is often a matter of *affect*, emerging in the singularity of situations. Affect is inherent to gestures and the intensity of emotions and feelings. By taking these singular situations seriously while looking at people's engagement with the past to make history, we might thence overcome the main obstacles for ethnography of history – linearity, causality, chronology or monumentalisation – that is, a Western model of historicism. Hence Stewart's call for the study of 'nonchronological' modes of historical consciousness (Stewart 2012: 9ff., 37ff.), in which affect is a pertinent mode to be ethnographically explored. We can thus read also Kathleen Stewart's experimental work on affect, understood as 'an idiosyncratic map of connections between a series of singularities' (2007: 4–5). In turn, Ika's seemingly idiosyncratic story can then serve as an example of affective modes of historical consciousness, in which 'affects highlight the question of the intimate impacts of forces in circulation. They are not exactly "personal" but they sure can pull the subject into places it didn't exactly "intend" to go' (Stewart 2007: 40), which equally applies to the critical events of the war and its impact on ordinary lives in a post-conflict polity (Navaro-Yashin 2012). To return to the case discussed here, despite its monumentalisation in the commemorative centre in Srebrenica-Potočari and in public discourses on the martyrdom, the critical event of the Srebrenica massacre intersects outside the officialdom, grand national narratives and the place as such with vernacular histories, witnesses, and their affective modes of engagement with the past in multiple ways that escape its monumentalisation.

### **Embedding Martyrs into the Sacred Landscape**

The annual gathering known as Prayer for Martyrs in Solun (*Šehidska dova u Solunu*) belongs to a different scale of attention and monumentalisation. In the verdant area (*harem*) around the local mosque a graveyard for 140 martyrs from the region was systematically created after the war. If we use Wagner's framework, the gathering that has been organised here since the end of the war can be described solely as a commemorative one, without any annual funerals (*dženaza*) unlike in Srebrenica. The great majority of bodies buried in Solun are not of formerly missing persons who would be recently identified. On the contrary, the bodies are of exactly known martyrs who were either buried here during the war because of an underground war hospital in its vicinity, or those who were buried originally elsewhere and subsequently reburied in Solun. Therefore, the Solun martyr graveyard is a commemorative site assembling the bodies from various corners of the highlands, rather than a place witnessing anything comparable to mass atrocities in Srebrenica, Korićanske Stijene or Stupni Do.

The question arising is how such gatherings, that do not index any singular locally-embedded event from the past but 140 micro-stories of sorrow and suffering, came to be framed or invoked in the present as a matter of history and collective remembering. If we adopted the conventional constructivist framework based solely on public discourses, we would arrived at a conclusion that this is just one of the many locally orchestrated politico-religious commemorations that mushroomed after the war to forge collective identity and national memory, with less media attention and political publicity by Srebrenica standards. Yet it is probably the single most important, emotionally charged, and arguably one of the biggest annual gatherings in the region, attracting hundreds of female and male Muslims of different walks of life, that emerged after the war in the Zvijezda highlands. From the point of view, which I pursue in this paper, the arising question is how such gatherings of collective prayers for martyrs have been animated as the realm of moral-cum-temporal orientations in which the acts of witnessing, enacted in prayers, relate the living to the dead, and the present to the past and vice versa. To engage with this question I suggest taking the local ritual calendar and practice of piety ethnographically seriously as modes of historical consciousness.

It is not accidental that the commemorative gathering is called *Šehidska dova* - a prayer for martyrs. Here attention needs to be paid to the word *dova* that is usually translated as 'prayer'. However, the word *dova* is used interchangeably for a specific individual or collective prayer, as well as for indoor or outdoor prayers (for example for rain, *dove za kišu*). The latter operate within a highly elaborated ritual calendar (cf. Henig n.d.) into which, I will illustrate shortly, the commemorative gathering indexing the critical war events has been incorporated. Outdoor prayers have a long-lasting continuity in Central Bosnia dating back to the Ottoman times, and thus pluralising the pasts in the present. The places of gatherings and worship, known as *dovišta*, can be found around the old Islamic tombs or mausolea, but also around the top of the hills, springs, caves and lime trees (Hadžijahić 1978).

Furthermore, there is a fixed date for the annual prayer at respective sites in the local ritual calendar. The dates are reckoned from counting respective weeks either after *Jurjevdan* (6th May, derived from the Orthodox Calendar) or *Alidjun* (2nd August). Prayers reckoned after *Jurjevdan* are known as Jurjev's prayer (*Jurjevske dove*). This period is in the local figurative language associated with rain and water, hence prayers for rain (*kišne dove*), and also with the processes of growing crops, grass and later with haymaking.<sup>7</sup> The mid-summer period is marked by *Alidjun* and the prayers are known as Alidjun's prayers (*Alidjunske dove*). The period around *Alidjun* is associated with sun, storms and fires. Thus, activities after *Alidjun* are associated with work on the fields and harvest.

The cycle of prayers for rain along with the days of *Jurjevdan* and *Alidjun* are a means of temporalisation of ritual activities, commemoration as well as work activities and time-reckoning more generally. Yet the ritual calendar is codified. The official organisation of the prayers is under the competence of the local office of the Islamic Community of Bosnia-Herzegovina. The office is also responsible for preparing a printed schedule (*raspored dova*) for all places where the prayers take place in the region. The schedules are distributed then from April onwards in the mosques during Friday sermons, though the majority of villagers know most of the dates by heart. And the prayer for martyrs in Solun appears on the printed schedule of prayers for rain as well; namely as the last, 20th *dova*, scheduled on 20th August.

---

<sup>7</sup> The Srebrenica commemorative gathering takes place at this time, hence villagers' frequent references to rain.

Although the commemoration of the martyrs in Solun has been incorporated into a formalised scheme of temporal management by the Islamic Community, as in the case of the Srebrenica commemorative gathering, it cannot be interpreted solely as a matter of monumentalised memory. The prayer gathering in Solun is simultaneously part of the ritual calendar, and of personal moral-cum-temporal orientation for Muslims in the highlands. Put differently, the prayer for martyrs in Solun belongs to a different temporal register that is embedded in vernacular histories and cosmologies. These are inseparable from a certain mode of action, recognised as acts of witnessing (*svjedočenje*) through prayer (*dova*) as a mode of invoking the past in the present.

This paper started with a vignette from a prayer for rain, and showed that Muslims who venerate these sacred sites come and pray for the souls of martyrs to bear witness to the past in the present. At the same time, however, veneration of the sites and praying there is an act of vital exchange of praying that earns good deeds, fortune and blessing (or needed rain during the agricultural season) for the living. Put differently, vital exchange helps to maintain vital relations between the living and the dead, and, in turn, between the past and the present. This is the cultural model of temporalisation and engagement with the past into which the recent war events have been absorbed in the highlands, including the Prayer for martyrs in Solun, and thus became part of the local vernacular histories. The annual gathering has simultaneously become a commemorative event, part of the local tradition of veneration of a sacred site, as well as incorporated into the agro-ritual calendar associated with regenerative symbolism (cf. Bringa 1995). Therefore, what we can observe is how the prayer for martyrs in Solun, has become rather a reversal of the monumentalising process of martyrdom. What is at play here is a multiplication of temporalisation, a topological dimension of time: war–post-war, rhythms of sacred–profane, ritual calendar–memory politics, and their approximation into frames of reference that shape the local historical consciousness, and the relationships between the past and the present in multiple ways.

## Conclusion

In this paper I outlined the manifold ways of making history in Muslim Bosnia. The paper focused on the 1990s war apprehended as a critical event and the modes of historical consciousness Bosnian Muslims produce to engage with it. There are undoubtedly a number of tensions and negotiations between the ways the critical event has been subsumed into the hegemonic and grand nationalised historical narratives, and the grass-roots historical consciousness, memories and experiences of the past. To overcome these tension and disjunctures the paper took the route of an ethnography of history to explore the nexus of memory politics with the grassroots affective sensibilities, materialities, and practices as modalities of engagement with the past, that co-creates vernacular histories. I argued that for Muslims in Central Bosnia, the act of prayer is *the* mode of engagement with the past, instantiated in interactions with specific materials and places, individual ethical conduct and prayer economy. Specifically, I traced two idioms of historical consciousness, emerging from the very act of prayer, that of witness and martyr. The two idioms articulated in the prayers help Bosnian Muslims to reanimate the recent critical events as the realms of personal moral-cum-temporal orientations rather than unreflectively partaking in an ongoing nationalisation of the past.

To conclude, what seems crucial to me, if we want to engage with the ethnographic specificity of the immanence of the plural pasts of the critical events in the present, is that we need to follow an

analytical perspective that would *not* favour the forms of monumentalisation of the past, based on chronological and teleological model of time as the main foci of analysis. The process of monumentalisation of violent critical events itself implicates the violence of forgetting. It is done so by fabrication, purification, glorification and linearisation of certain fragments of the past while silencing, ignoring or deliberately excluding others. By participating in the monumentalisation process people themselves perpetuate and maintain the process of purification of the past. In turn, anthropologists engaging solely with public discourses and public conversations without paying any attention to other interrelated domains and immanent modes of temporalisation and plural pasts in the present, unreflectively perpetuate the monumental histories as well, as if this were the only way to produce knowledge about the past. Therefore I concur with Charles Stewart's suggestion (2012: 9) to take the modes of invoking the past in the present - such as dreams, prayers, calendars or affect discussed earlier – *recursively* (Holbraad 2012; Stewart 2012: 9) as a way to reformulate our own theories and assumptions as to what qualifies as the very notion of history.

## References

- Argenti, Nicolas, and Katharina Schramm, eds. 2010. *Remembering Violence: Anthropological Perspectives on Intergenerational Transmission*. Oxford: Berghahn.
- Bougarel, Xavier. 2007. "Death and the Nationalist: Martyrdrom, War Memory and Veteran Identity among Bosnian Muslims." Pp. 167–191 in *The New Bosnian Mosaic: Identities, Memories and Moral Claims in a Post-war Society*, eds. X. Bougarel, E. Helms, and G. Duijzings. Aldershot: Ashgate.
- Bringa, Tone. 1995. *Being Muslim the Bosnian Way. Identity and Community in a Central Bosnian Village*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Das, Veena. 1996. *Critical Events: An Anthropological Perspective on Contemporary India*. Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- 2007. *Life and Words: Violence and the Descent into the Ordinary*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Fortes, Meyer. *Religion, Morality and the Person: Essays on Tallensi Religion*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Hadžijahić, Muhamed. 1978. "Sinkretistički Elementi u Islamu u Bosni i Hercegovini." *Prilozi za Orijentalnu Filologiju* 28–29: 301–328.
- Hacking, Ian. 1996. "Memory Sciences, Memory Politics." Pp. 67–88 in *Tense Past: Cultural Essays in Trauma and Memory*, eds. P. Antze and M. Lambek. London, New York: Routledge.
- Hayden, Robert M. 2007. "Moral Vision and Impaired Insight: The Imagining of Other Peoples' Communities in Bosnia." *Current Anthropology* 48, no. 1:105–131.
- Henig, David. 2012. "Iron in the Soil: Living with Military Waste in Bosnia-Herzegovina." *Anthropology Today* 28, no. 1: 21–23.
- . 2014. "Contested Choreographies of Sacred Spaces in Muslim Bosnia." Pp. 130–160 in *Choreographies of Shared Sacred Sites: State, Religion and Conflict Resolution*, eds. K. Barkey and E. Barkan. New York: Columbia University Press.
- . *The Embers of Allah: Cosmologies of Vital Exchange in Central Bosnian Highlands*. (Book manuscript in preparation)
- Henkel, Heinko. 2005. "Between Belief and Unbelief Lies the Performance of *Salât*: Meaning and Efficacy of a Muslim Ritual." *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 11, no. 4: 487–507.
- Herzfeld, Michael. 1991. *A Place in History: Social and Monumental Time in a Creatan Town*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Hirsch, Eric, and Charles Stewart. 2005. "Introduction: Ethnographies of Historicity." *History and Anthropology* 16, no. 3: 261–274.
- Holbraad, Martin. 2012. *Truth in Motion: The Recursive Anthropology of Cuban Divination*. Chicago: Chicago University Press.
- Kapferer, Bruce. 1988. *Legends of People, Myths of State: Violence, Intolerance, Political Culture in Sri Lanka and Australia*. Washington: Smithsonian Institution.
- Lambek, Michael. 2002. *The Weight of the Past: Living with History in Mahajanga, Madagascar*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Mauss, Marcel. [1909] 2003. *On Prayer*. Oxford: Berghahn.
- Navaro-Yashin, Yael. 2012. *The Make-Believe Space: Affective Geography in a Postwar Polity*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Sant Cassia, Paul. 2005. *Bodies of Evidence: Burial, Memory and the Recovery of Missing Persons in Cyprus*. Oxford: Berghahn.
- Stewart, Charles. 2012. *Dreaming and Historical Consciousness in Island Greece*. Harvard: Harvard University Press.
- Stewart, Kathleen. 2007. *Ordinary Affects*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Verdery, Katherine. 1999. *The Political Lives of Dead Bodies: Reburial and Postsocialist Change*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Wagner, Sarah. 2008. *To Know Where He Lies: DNA Technology and the Search for Srebrenica's Missing*. Berkeley: University of California Press.