

## Locally Embedded Civil Society Organizations and Public Diplomacy: the Advocacy Roles of the “Mothers of Srebrenica” in Promoting a Culture of Remembrance

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### Abstract:

Increasingly, non-state actors exercise unofficial forms of influence within international affairs. Analyzing the actions and platforms in which they operate offers a broader perspective on their influence within diplomatic spheres traditionally occupied by state actors. This paper explores the relationship between victim-oriented advocacy roles taken by the NGO ‘Mothers of Srebrenica’ and the resulting formulation of a ‘culture of remembrance’ as an unofficial part of Bosnia and Herzegovina’s cultural and public diplomacy portfolio. We examine the Mothers’ advocacy work in promoting genocide remembrance and fighting genocide denial within the country’s foreign policy agency framework. We scrutinize under which circumstances their advocacy shapes or is formulated in parallel with official state diplomacy. We trace three types of advocacy engagement and discuss the influence in contributing to the country’s cultural and public diplomacy. This analysis contributes to scholarship on the influence of non-state actors in public diplomacy by examining the role of advocacy organizations on local, regional, and global levels and expanding the scholarship about the intersection of non-state actors and cultural and public diplomacy to include states undergoing transition, particularly post-conflict states.

**Keywords:** civil society, Bosnia and Herzegovina, foreign policy, public diplomacy, Srebrenica, remembrance.

### Introduction

Increased connectivity in a globalized world have impacted public diplomacy (Gregory, 2008), challenging assumptions set by traditional approaches and operational principles. Today, there are more opportunities for non-state actors to play significant roles in public diplomacy, whether by challenging states through protest actions or supporting them in providing humanitarian assistance and foreign aid programs. For example, non-state actors were key to governments agreeing to outlaw the use of landmines (Hocking, 2004). Theoretically, the involvement of civil society organizations (CSOs) in such foreign policy agendas enhances transparency and accountability and ensures a greater ‘democratic quality of political processes’ (Dembinski & Joachim, 2014). Scholarship around the impact of non-state actors and their potential roles has included a call for more empirical studies (Lee & Ayhan, 2015). Prior research has examined the impact of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) at the EU level, noting the importance of legitimacy and efficacy for these actors, ensuring their survival as relevant actors in public diplomacy (La Porte, 2015). However, this research focuses on the relevance of non-state actors in states generally considered as having well-established diplomatic networks and foreign policies. How are non-state actors able to steer, support, challenge, or act in parallel with state diplomatic efforts in post-conflict or weak states? We analyze these questions through a case study from Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Only a handful of locally based CSOs in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) have managed to affect the country’s image abroad and influence approaches of other countries toward BiH. These non-state actors have contributed to shaping Bosnian cultural diplomacy by adding to or replacing their

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agency in public diplomacy carried out by official state institutions. A local non-governmental, women-led organization, the Association ‘Mothers of Srebrenica,’ is an example of such engagement. Andjelić (2019) argues that while victims and their organizations can be found in all parts of BiH and among all ethnic groups, only some organizations have managed to exert soft power rooted in demands for justice and truth for crimes committed on such a massive scale, including presence at International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) and International Court of Justice (ICJ) verdicts. By doing so, they bring regional and international attention to their cause and promote the culture of ‘genocide remembrance’ internationally, partaking in cultural and public diplomacy creation. Their sustained and episodic mobilization and actions, based on grievance claims resulting from the loss and trauma of the 1995 Srebrenica Genocide, have affected local, regional and international leaders’ perceptions toward genocide remembrance, peacebuilding, and reconciliation prospects in BiH.

This article explores the relationship between the victim-oriented advocacy of the ‘Mothers of Srebrenica’ (MoS) and its influence in the formation of a ‘culture of remembrance’ as an unofficial part of BiH’s diplomacy portfolio. We examine the correlations between MoS’ advocacy work in promoting genocide remembrance and fighting genocide denial from a public diplomacy perspective. We scrutinize under which circumstances their advocacy shapes or is formulated in parallel with official diplomacy conducted by the state. Ultimately, we contribute to scholarship on the influence of non-state actors in public diplomacy by expanding the discussion to post-conflict and weak states.

## Theorizing local non-state actors’ involvement in diplomatic affairs

The main theoretical frameworks used to explain the role of non-state actors in international relations (IR) have largely been state-centered. However, a ‘new form of multilateral co-operation beyond intergovernmental diplomacy has gained increasing importance. In this new paradigm of international co-operation, ‘global partnerships’, ‘multi-stakeholder initiatives’ and ‘global public policy networks’ are perceived as the future of international co-operation, moving beyond traditional nation–state multilateralism’ (Martens, 2007). Our case study exemplifies how public diplomacy is practiced at multiple levels by a non-state actor in an effort to create change not only at the state level, but beyond.

The role and influence of non-state actors has expanded in the post-Cold War period (Büthe, 2004). As the shift from ‘high politics’ to ‘low politics’ and the importance of human rights, environmental protection, and women’s rights has begun to dominate the international agenda, NGOs have become increasingly active in policy discussions. Technological developments have further contributed to NGOs’ ability to enjoy full freedom to interact and network without state control (Weiss & Gordenker, 1996).

Over time, international and national NGOs have mobilized expertise to contribute to policy thinking on international affairs, acting as policy entrepreneurs at domestic and international levels by advocating and influencing agenda-setting processes. They have played an important role as fora for ‘informal diplomacy’ (Higgott et al., 2000). After all, non-state actors represent neutral territory and can convene ‘independent dialogues’ or closed seminars, which official representatives then attend under the facade of acting in a private capacity (Stone, 2001). Whether considered as helping to create ‘epistemic communities’ (Haas, 1992) or as part of transnational advocacy networks (Keck & Sikkink, 1998), non-state actors have demonstrated their reach and potential in diplomacy through cultural and public engagement with populations or governments abroad. They have been especially effective in specialized areas of policy such as the environment (Betsill & Correll, 2008) or global health (Adams et al., 2008; Lencucha et al., 2011). The Open Society Foundations are a good example of the influence of non-governmental transnational actors currently affirming themselves in the area of ‘supra-diplomacy’ (Colonos, 2001). Another example are diaspora groups that draw on a variety of strategies to promote their political agendas to policymakers in their homeland, via the governments of their host countries,

or international institutions (Østergaard-Nielsen, 2001). This ‘new public diplomacy’ accounts for collaboration among traditional diplomatic actors, primarily the state, and non-governmental, local, transnational and international actors (Cull, 2019). Our case study adds to this literature by examining how a non-state actor pursues its advocacy in a post-conflict state setting, both with and without the explicit support of state actors.

The rise of the so-called ‘unofficial diplomacy’ has attracted growing interest in academic circles. Several useful concepts have emerged in the literature. Hocking (1999) introduced ‘catalytic diplomacy’ as a growing symbiosis between a variety of state and non-state actors, wherein diplomatic interactions become a virtually seamless web of activity. Toticaguena (2005) uses ‘paradiplomacy’ to signify instruments of cross-border collaboration promoted by Basque nationalists, including the involved mobilization of the Basque diaspora, to strengthen the nation-building process while bypassing the Spanish state. Meanwhile, ‘informal diplomacy entails activities or discussions involving academics and intellectuals, journalists, business elites and others as well as government officials and political leaders ‘acting in their private capacity’ (Stone, 2004). Ayhan (2019) has mapped these into state-centric, neo-statist, nontraditional, society-centric, and accommodative types, providing a much-needed categorization of non-state actors in public diplomacy. In all but state-centric perspectives, the state allows or accommodates a certain amount of influence to non-state actors in terms of public diplomacy, thus opening up the field of influence. This demonstrates states’ acknowledgement of the important role non-traditional actors play in public diplomacy.

Here it is important to highlight that both political opportunities and constraints can trigger mobilization of various NGOs to pursue particular interests (Ayhan, 2019). As La Porte (2012) notes, such actors have ‘basic organization, clear objectives, stable representation, and coordinated activity,’ and are interested in pursuing and sustaining a, ‘permanent influence on policies, procedures, and international relations.’ Thus, what becomes more important than the subject conducting the public diplomacy – traditionally the state actor – is the actual objective of the public diplomacy itself (La Porte, 2012). Scholarship on the influence of non-state actors that are not necessarily state-specific advocacy organizations but may operate transnationally and pursue public diplomacy goals locally and internationally remains scarce. A case study of ‘VANK’, a “Korean non-governmental organization (NGO) that mobilizes and empowers young Korean enthusiasts to promote Korea to foreigners” (Ayhan, 2018, p. 52), examines its influence on Korean nation building processes abroad through cyber diplomacy. However, it provides little analysis on its influence within Korea. Few empirical accounts of such non-state actors exist, especially in post-conflict countries.

This article’s engagement with the ‘Mothers of Srebrenica’ represents a novel case study approach, examining the relationship between non-state actors and their influence in public diplomacy in a setting where traditional state actors are unable or unwilling to pursue public diplomacy on their own. Thus, this paper not only examines the ‘intermestic’ approach, the taking up of domestic issues on the international sphere as public diplomacy actors (La Porte, 2012) empirically, but it does so in a post-conflict state setting, on multiple levels.

The MoS are particularly effective advocacy actors in public diplomacy due to a number of factors. They have established a culture of remembrance and acknowledgement of the Srebrenica Genocide in and outside of BiH including recognition by international organizations. They are considered credible because of their losses as mothers, but also due to the ways in which they translate injustice on a personal and societal level. Moreover, as we will demonstrate, they utilize all four ‘essential approaches to advocacy in public diplomacy’: direct appeals, indirect appeals, crowding the message space, and partnership (Cull, 2019, p. 82).

In the following sections, we demonstrate how the traumatic and unresolved contentious issues that stem from the Srebrenica Genocide are a central factor that sustain the mobilization of the ‘Mothers of Srebrenica.’ They have led them to become a non-state diplomatic agent of victim-oriented advocacy and the prime agent in developing a ‘culture of remembrance’ as a part of

BiH's unofficial public diplomacy portfolio abroad. Our analysis provides a new dimension to the scholarship on non-state actors and public diplomacy, particularly relevant for weak and post-conflict states.

## The main argument and methods

The MoS have become deeply embedded in BiH's political landscape and their actions reflect on perceptions of BiH's foreign policy agenda internationally. Their mission is locked within a deeply traumatic conflict-generated identity. Their socially driven public actions directly shed light on controversial topics regularly avoided by the state due to the inability of the political system to create space for consensus.<sup>1</sup> Pursued through available state-based and transnational channels, the women's mission is keeping the memory of the Srebrenica Genocide alive, preventing denial among those who dispute legal and historical facts, and honoring commitments to victims. MoS act locally, regionally and internationally; their work comprises various methods – marching, writing, speaking and cooperating with international institutions, collecting information, lobbying, mobilizing or educating public opinion. As such, their work strengthens the public interest, 'rule of law' and democracy, among others (Thurer, 2009).

The MoS are by no means the only actor in BiH attempting to influence domestic or foreign policy. The country's layered institutions and a variety of non-state actors co-exist and compete in order to influence the direction of its foreign policy due to weak institutional actors, power-sharing, and an uncoordinated governmental system (Hasić & Karabegović, 2019). However, they have carved out a niche for their advocacy over more than two decades, becoming one of the most influential and recognizable non-state actors in BiH and the world today (Nettelfield, 2010). They have taken over and occupied unattended parts of the agency from state institutions in charge of foreign policy and managed to create and pursue political objectives that are not necessarily sanctioned by traditional task carriers (Hill, 2003). Their persuasive and persistent public actions have not only affected local, regional, and international leaders' perceptions toward Srebrenica Genocide remembrance, peacebuilding, and reconciliation prospects in BiH. They have also managed to provoke modifications of certain policies directed toward regional political stabilization (Andjelić, 2019). The MoS' work is characterized by informality, personal relationships, and consensus-building. This image is reinforced by public relations efforts and continued media exposure of their leading figures (Stone, 2004).

This paper uses the 'most-similar systems design', where cases are similar on several control variables, but outcomes are different (cf. Lijphart, 1971). Each of the types of advocacy helps the MoS forward their agenda, though each has a specific direction, particular audiences, and differing results. We are primarily concerned with the types of MoS advocacy observed through policy orientation, specific policy objectives, levels and durability of claim-making, sustained use of organized means of direct engagement, public statements, lobbying, and other activities. We do this by examining grievances related to the explicit or implicit denial of conflict-generated legacies. The MoS use these to advance their advocacy in response to missed opportunities by the state. We argue these grievances and the public diplomacy opportunities have shaped the types of advocacy and elaborate on these processes throughout our empirical analysis. However, we are fully aware there are multiple complex processes at play and that the activities and impact of the MoS are broader than this.

Our analysis is based on public statements, judgements, reports, and other available data on their activities primarily in the local languages of BiH and English, though we have also utilized Dutch and Swedish news sources. The analysis also draws on videos and select participant observation of MoS' activities over the last twenty five years with a particular focus on key events and activities for public diplomacy. We use triangulation to incorporate multiple sources in order to better elaborate on the contention as well as each of the advocacy efforts over time (Tarrow 2019). In this

<sup>1</sup> The lack of consensus about historical narratives has been elaborated on by scholarship widely. For a good overview, see Moll (2013).

way, we exemplify how each of the different advocacy efforts has led to results.

All of the actions and initiatives undertaken by the MoS are related to grievances regarding the explicit or implicit denial of conflict-generated legacies. They take up and occupy spaces traditionally managed by the state to engage in creating policies that promote a culture of remembrance and fight genocide denial. We identify three types of engagement. The first is the promotion of a culture of remembrance through truth-seeking and direct engagement with judicial institutions at multiple levels. The second refers to seeking global recognition of the Srebrenica Genocide through establishing a locally embedded culture of commemoration. Finally, the third type involves the use of social movements, protests, and engagement in various public diplomacy campaigns internationally to call out genocide denial in a variety of forms, conducted in cooperation with other transnational actors.

The following section provides a brief overview of the events that have driven the advocacy of the Mothers of Srebrenica Association before analyzing their intermestic approach in cultural and public diplomacy.

### **‘Mothers of Srebrenica’ - a quintessential representation of victimhood** ***A brief historical overview of major events, judgements, and decisions***

Srebrenica became an isolated enclave to which Bosniaks from all over eastern BiH fled following attacks by Serb forces during the 1992-1995 war.<sup>2</sup> UN Security Council Resolution n. 819 proclaimed Srebrenica as one of six ‘safe areas’ in BiH, to be protected by the UN Mission in BiH (UNMBIH) and thus guaranteed to be ‘free from any armed attack or any other hostile act’ in 1993 (Silber & Little, 1996). However, the Security Council Resolution was ambiguous about international commitments to the ‘safe areas’ and did not guarantee their defense by means of any UN Protection Force (Simic, 2009). Later, UN Security Council Resolution 824 restricted the use of force explicitly to ‘acting in self-defense.’

In 1995, Srebrenica was under the guardianship of 150 UN Dutch peacekeepers. They proved to be no match for the 2000 Serbs surrounding the town in the events which would later become known as the Srebrenica Genocide. On July 11, 1995, Bosnian Serb paramilitary forces under the command of Ratko Mladić, later tried and convicted by the ICTY, overwhelmed the lightly armed Dutch peacekeepers and seized the UN declared ‘safe-area.’ They occupied Srebrenica and executed over 8,000 men, separating women and children and forcibly transferring them out of Srebrenica (ICTY, Prosecutor v. Krstić, 2001).

In the aftermath, there has been a myriad of legal battles to establish the facts and timeline of events, but also to solve missing persons cases and to have political actors acknowledge their responsibility. Since the Dayton Peace Accords in 1995 ended the war in BiH, the country has been administratively divided into two subnational entities (Republika Srpska (RS) and the Federation (FBiH)), with power-sharing arrangements on all levels of government between three ‘constituent’ groups (Bosniaks, Bosnian Croats, and Bosnian Serbs). This leads to fragmentation and contestation on political decision making and implementation.<sup>3</sup>

Srebrenica is located within the RS, the subnational entity where an ethnonational Bosnian Serb political establishment has dominated since the war. Even though the RS issued an apology after it was forced to create a Commission related to Srebrenica by the Human Rights Chamber of BiH, this has not had a lasting impact. As Karčić (2015) notes, the Bosnian Serb political establishment has reneged on the Commission’s results and today continues to deny that a genocide took place. Hence, multiple, competing narratives reign within the country despite international rulings and

<sup>2</sup> For a detailed overview of the war and the relevance of the Srebrenica enclave as well as events surrounding the Srebrenica Genocide, please see: Bećirević (2014) and Nettelfield & Wagner (2014).

<sup>3</sup> We have engaged with BiH’s complex political system elsewhere. For a brief overview of how this relates to the country’s foreign policy perspectives, please see Hasić & Karabegović (2019).

previous acknowledgements by both the Serbian government as well as the Bosnian Serb political elites within the country (Moll, 2013).

In November 1999, the UN Secretary-General presented a report before the General Assembly about Srebrenica and acknowledged the failure of the UN to protect the Bosnian Muslim population. In 2004, in a unanimous ruling on the case of Prosecutor v. Krstić in the Appeals Chamber of the ICTY ruled that the massacre of the enclave's male inhabitants constituted genocide, a crime under international law. The following year, UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan described the Srebrenica Genocide as the worst crime on European soil since the Second World War. In 2007, in the Bosnian Genocide case held before the ICJ, Serbia was cleared of direct responsibility for genocide but was found in breach of the Genocide Convention for not doing enough to prevent the genocide and for not prosecuting those responsible.

In 2015, Russia, acting upon the request of Serbia and the Republika Srpska entity, vetoed a UN resolution condemning the Srebrenica massacre as genocide. In the same year, both the EP and the U.S. Congress adopted resolutions that reiterated the crime's nature as genocide. Meanwhile, in several verdicts (2013, 2014, and 2019), the Dutch district and supreme courts found their UN personnel partly liable for failing to prevent more than 300 deaths.

While not exhaustive, this brief historical overview provides some of the major turning points regarding legal advocacy around the Srebrenica Genocide, which reflect the continued need for public diplomacy around Srebrenica. It also contextualizes the continuously politicized environment surrounding acknowledgement of the events as Genocide on the local, regional, and international levels.

### ***Post-genocide developments***

Given such a distinct type of victimization and the regional distribution of the disappearances as a result of the Srebrenica Genocide, the families of missing persons in the Srebrenica area organized themselves separately during the post-conflict period. They initially set up small, local organizations run by returnees located close to the areas where their loved ones went missing. Women Bosniak survivors of Srebrenica created several organizations in Tuzla in north-eastern Bosnia in 1996, a region to which many from eastern BiH resettled, and in Sarajevo, the capital. Some of the prominent organizations were 'Mothers of Srebrenica and Podrinje,' 'Women of Srebrenica,' and the 'Movement of Mothers of the Enclaves Srebrenica and Žepa' (Hronesova, 2017).

The Mothers of the Srebrenica and Žepa enclaves actively lobbied for investigations into international responsibility regarding the fall of Srebrenica (Delpla et al., 2012). The Association, formally registered as the 'Movement of Mothers of Srebrenica and Žepa Enclave,' was established in 1996 with offices in Sarajevo and Srebrenica. The women-led, non-governmental, and non-profit organization gathered survivors and family members of the victims who disappeared or were killed. Over time, the association expanded its work across the country, working with local and diaspora actors.

Informally known as the 'Mothers of Srebrenica,' their resilience and activities over the last 25 years have become recognizable on an international scale. In an effort to pursue punitive justice, the women demonstrate, march, and engage with media to raise awareness and advocate for the victims and survivors in a variety of non-violent ways. Moreover, they support one another (Simic, 2009). They advocate for a culture of remembrance and the prevention of future atrocities, using their own experiences as a basis for demonstrating the importance and relevance of their work, in BiH and on the global scale (Subašić, 2011). They draw on their identification as mothers who have lost their children, brothers, and husbands, eliciting an emotional response that resonates on a universal scale (Simic, 2004).



## **Promoting genocide remembrance and fighting genocide denial: types of MoS advocacy**

Since their initial establishment, the association has sought to formulate and establish clear demands of local and international communities. These include investigation, revelation, and publication of all facts pertaining to the Srebrenica Genocide, exhumation of all mass graves, the identification of bodies, compensation, reparation, returnee rights, and indictments of all war criminals. Through their persistence, they have gradually gained attention, recognition, and responses by peaceful marching, writing, speaking, and cooperating with the ICTY and other actors (Nettlefield & Wagner, 2004). In BiH, they are well-respected by the leading Bosniak politicians and many co-ethnics.

In the immediate aftermath of the Srebrenica Genocide, the women survivors established the association in order to lobby for the memory of their lost ones not to be forgotten, in order for investigations to continue and to bring about justice. For many of them, it was initially a way to continue living with purpose. Upon establishing the organization officially in 1999, the MoS clearly delineated their goals in terms of the Bosnian government as well as the international community (Simic, 2009). These are closely linked to the symbolism of their actions to motherhood, victimhood, and doggedness in pursuing justice. These are repeated by the mothers throughout their speeches, solidifying their image. Their ability to link to these archetypes and to tell their stories effectively has greatly helped their advocacy efforts, as evidenced throughout our empirical sections, regardless of the form of engagement.

They have worked to create a culture of remembrance around the Srebrenica Genocide across the world. The most prominent example is the Srebrenica flower. It is stitched together and sold by the women as a symbol of remembrance. Its white flower, symbolizing the innocence of victims, has eleven petals for the eleven days of July in 1995 during which the genocide occurred. The green center is representative of hope and the effort towards justice and recognition. The flower has become ubiquitous, and the design is used at commemoration events across the world in an effort to demonstrate solidarity with the MoS. Many of the organizations that collaborate with them use the same symbol in their logos, and individuals in BiH and across the world wear the flower pins, much like the poppy is worn in the United Kingdom. In the following sections, we elaborate further on three different types of engagement.

### ***Truth seeking and direct engagement with judicial institutions***

The MoS have been adamant about engaging with judicial institutions on the international level, primarily the ICJ and ICTY. These actions, while sometimes aligned with the Bosnian state, have been distinct from policies pursued by the Bosnian state. However, as they have sought out how to best utilize international judicial institutions, the MoS have voiced which goals the state ought to be advocating for. Thus, their public diplomacy efforts have been complementary but often parallel with the state.

BiH submitted a case to the ICJ against Yugoslavia for genocide at the beginning of the war. After the war, the country's tripartite presidency became responsible for handling the case, as dictated by the Dayton Peace Accords. This led to obstructions by the Bosnian Serb political establishment about the country's case. Despite these changing dynamics within the Bosnian state, the MoS continued to support the country's case against Serbia at the ICJ throughout. Meanwhile, the ICJ did not acknowledge BiH's internal squabbles. It ruled that while Srebrenica fulfilled the legal definition of genocide, “Serbia was not responsible for its commission or facilitation, but it was responsible for not duly preventing and punishing it (Bonora, 2019, p. 119).”

The MoS and other activist groups from Srebrenica utilized the judgement to advocate for a special status for Srebrenica within the RS, emphasizing that the Bosnian Serb Army and the RS were responsible for genocide. While this was ultimately turned down by Bosnian Serb politicians, the

MoS have continued to use the ICJ ruling to pursue its agenda on the domestic level.

In the case of engagement with the ICTY, the MoS' claims about the importance of pursuing investigations into crimes committed during the 1992-1995 conflict helped to solidify Bosnian state institutions' cooperation with the ICTY, particularly in comparison to neighboring Serbian and Croatian policies (Bonora, 2019). The MoS provided testimony during a number of ICTY trials. Later, they further shared their stories with journalists, oral historians, researchers, and by way of their own publications (Leydesdorff, 2011). This has helped the MoS reinforce their identity and mission over the years, making them a viable public diplomacy actor, as their loss resonates with the international public and within certain groups on the domestic level.

Beyond the ICJ and ICTY, the MoS hold a strong belief that Dutch peacekeepers need to take responsibility for their inaction in preventing the atrocities which occurred in 1995. They have pursued numerous lawsuits at multiple judicial levels in addition to advocacy campaigns in an effort to shed light on the events of 1995 (Brockman-Hawe, 2011; Palchetti, 2015). These lawsuits are outside of the purview of the Bosnian state and are representative of the Mothers' individual truth-seeking and justice efforts as public diplomacy actors.

Their work has led to results. Due to pressure and protests by the MoS seeking accountability from the Dutch state, the Dutch government resigned in 2002. The women published a collection of 104 testimonies on the UN and Dutch implications in the genocide (Women of Srebrenica, 2008). In 2004, the families of the Srebrenica victims, led by the Mothers, proposed an out-of-court settlement to the Dutch government, which was rejected the following year (Alić, 2007). However, due to the Mothers' persistence, there has nonetheless been some legal acceptance from the Dutch state in terms of compensating victims' families. Nonetheless, their legal battles continue at the time of writing, with new lawsuits filed at the European Court of Human Rights in January 2020.

The MoS' continued presence in the Dutch media, including statements and testimonies, has only added to the level of moral responsibility felt by many Dutch political actors and public about not doing more to prevent the genocide. Some scholars have even argued that this has led to Dutch foreign policy actors being skeptical towards Serbia and in terms of EU enlargement (Lasas, 2013). Moreover, the Dutch government has donated funds to BiH on an annual basis and helped to establish the memorial center in Srebrenica, thus taking financial responsibility in maintaining the memory of what happened while not taking full legal responsibility (Simic, 2009). The MoS' advocacy efforts have contributed indirectly to shaping bilateral relations between the Netherlands and BiH, as well as between the Netherlands and Serbia. This engagement with judicial institutions at different levels demonstrates their intermestic approach to public diplomacy, separate and unsolicited by the Bosnian state, yet influencing state to state relations and taking on additional public diplomacy roles, leading to results enjoyed by the state.

### ***Forging a locally embedded and globally recognized culture of commemoration***

The MoS' perseverance in pursuing justice and recognition for the loss of their loved ones and the acknowledgement of the Srebrenica Genocide have had far-reaching impact. Unlike the first type of engagement, the second is completely advocacy-based, utilizing international genocide awareness campaigns aimed at fighting genocide denial. Through their advocacy work, the MoS fill in for the Bosnian state as a cultural and public diplomacy actor by promoting genocide recognition resolutions and commemoration events in BiH and beyond, as the state's agreement on this remains disputed. While this engagement occurs without official state institutions' endorsement, it enjoys the support of the majority of the Bosniak political elite and some state level institutions such as the Srebrenica Memorial Center, other victim organizations, and diaspora actors. This exemplifies the intermestic approach, as it opens up a space for them to further their advocacy despite contested local dynamics.



Throughout BiH, the Bosnian Serb political elite contests Srebrenica genocide memorialization and promotes alternative commemorations to highlight different narratives. This includes the current mayor of Srebrenica, who regularly provokes victims’ associations by denying the genocide. The former President of Republika Srpska and current Member of the Presidency, Milorad Dodik, includes Srebrenica as part of his rhetoric arguing against the victimhood of Bosniaks during the war and promoting the idea of shared guilt by all ethnonational groups. He argues the Bosniak political leadership uses Srebrenica to argue for a stronger Bosnian state, while he attempts to weaken state institutions and equates the RS to a state through his own political actions and rhetoric (Hasić, 2020).

The MoS have lobbied to make the commemoration of the Srebrenica Genocide an annual event internationally as well as a national day of commemoration in BiH, to both shed light on their continued work as well as to remember the loss of their children, husbands, and relatives. This has helped to increase the awareness about the Srebrenica Genocide. Over the years, they have partnered with organizations and networks of activists across the world in order to support their mission. In 1999, the Srebrenica Justice International campaign, made up of 18 European and American organizations, helped to elevate the Mothers’ messages on an international level (Simic, 2009). Perhaps most significantly for the region, they have partnered with a Serbian women’s organization, Women in Black, to commemorate the Srebrenica Genocide in BiH and Serbia together (Simic & Daly, 2011). This advocacy work represents more than the two states have managed to organize jointly to commemorate the Srebrenica Genocide over the last twenty five years.

More recently, the Mothers have worked with the UK-based Remembering Srebrenica charity to raise awareness of the dangers of hate speech, and to institute remembrance activities in the UK and BiH. “Through their victimhood, the ‘Mothers’ express an agency to act and demand accountability demonstrating the growing voice of women who refuse to be quiet. They become victims, agents and survivors, playing all these different and -- confrontational roles -- at the same time” (Simic, 2009, p. 228).

The women’s mission regarding commemorations and pursuits of genocide recognition is closely intertwined with their desire to have acknowledgement of their loss on a societal level in Bosnia and Herzegovina and the region, including by the Serbian political elite. While attendance of Serbian political actors at commemoration events has been considered an indicator of the level reconciliation in the region, it is also reflective of foreign policy and diplomatic calculations. On the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Srebrenica Genocide, the Serbian president at the time, Boris Tadić, attended commemoration activities. Five years later, the Srebrenica Declaration, an apology adopted by the Serbian parliament in 2010, seemed to signal that the Mothers’ goals would be reached. However, as Dragović-Soso (2012, p. 165) notes, “this apology is more accurately understood as an instrument of foreign policy, whose primary audience is the European Union and whose main aim is to aid Serbia’s project of European integration,” rather than having the longevity to institute a change in the relationship between the two countries.

Still, the MoS have continued to focus on their mission despite Serbian foreign policy signaling towards the EU rather than having a genuine interest in improving relations with BiH or acknowledging responsibility for the genocide. While widespread genocide denial among the majority of Serbs in Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina continued, a further apology was offered by the President of Serbia, Tomislav Nikolić, in 2013, for the ‘crimes in Srebrenica’ which had the ‘characteristics of genocide.’ The MoS president, Munira Subašić, demanded in response, ‘We do not need someone to kneel and ask for forgiveness. We want to hear the Serbian president and Serbia say the word genocide (McElroy, 2013).’ While the MoS’ activism around genocide remembrance was credited as one of the main reasons for the apology, the women expected better results.

Aleksandar Vučić visited the Potočari Memorial Center in 2015. As Clark (2016) notes, the relationship between the Serbian President and the Bosniak member of the BiH Presidency improved with the

first joint sessions of government taking place soon thereafter. Here, the MoS were instrumental from a public diplomacy perspective, by easing tensions between the two countries. They welcomed him in Srebrenica, despite the fact that he, like all Serbian presidents to date, has not apologized or acknowledged the ICTY verdict that Srebrenica constituted a genocide.

Commemorations continue to play an important diplomatic role by positioning BiH and Srebrenica as a symbolic reminder of remembrance. Each annual commemoration serves as an instrument against genocide denial, and every dignitary's attendance as a signal of the importance of remembering. The Mothers serve as the major local actors each year by welcoming visitors and having a central role in the organization of commemoration activities. They serve on the board of the Srebrenica Memorial Center. Their actions and influence set the tone and agenda of the memorialization activities, further signifying their importance on a public diplomacy level.

The intensity of the MoS' actions is associated with grievance-related factors that have helped to maintain their conflict-generated mission and identity over the last twenty-five years. They have advanced their mission as an organization within public diplomacy and taken up missed opportunities by the state in pursuing the same. Ultimately, they advance norms around genocide remembrance as public diplomacy actors beyond the state. Today, they are at the center of memorialization activities, pursuing a culture of commemoration in the country and providing a space for international engagement.

### ***Social movements: seeking international recognition and fighting genocide deniers***

The third type of public diplomacy engagement is direct engagement outside of BiH. In this engagement, the MoS take on genocide denial by protesting and seeking recognition from various international institutions.<sup>4</sup> This is a form of cultural and public diplomacy agency, a niche where they directly (and in collaboration with others) call out genocide deniers and seek recognition of the Srebrenica Genocide from other countries or by other relevant actors.

Not only have the women participated in ICTY trials as witnesses as noted above, they also regularly attended sessions and followed cases, providing commentary on the processes, final verdicts. During their public appearances and protests, the Mothers emphasize how genocide denial should not be tolerated, how their loss stands for the importance of fostering remembrance and commemoration and how these atrocities cannot happen again. Through their protests, they engage as intermestic public diplomacy actors.

The MoS have called upon other international institutions to mark the commemoration of the Srebrenica Genocide, fostering a culture of remembrance on the international level. In doing so, they perform the diplomacy work of the Bosnian state, which, due to a lack of uniform agreement on this question, does not engage with it in its foreign policy. However, as a result of numerous campaigns and lobbying efforts spearheaded by or in collaboration with the MoS, European level and US institutions have recognized and passed resolutions marking the Srebrenica Genocide. To date, efforts at the UN level have had mixed results due to Russia's veto on the Security Council and its alignment with Serbia. However, even here, the MoS' public diplomacy efforts have been visible more so than those of the Bosnian state. The Secretary-General of the UN spoke about the importance of remembering and the impact meeting the Mothers' had on him during his visit to BiH in 2012 at a commemoration event organized by the Permanent Mission of BiH to the UN.<sup>5</sup> Already in 2009, the EP passed a resolution declaring the events in Srebrenica an "act of genocide"

<sup>4</sup> Their engagement with local judicial institutions was often unsuccessful. For instance, Mothers of Srebrenica filed criminal charges against Milan Mandić and Elta TV journalists in February 2014, for inciting national, racial and religious hatred. Mandić served as the president of a small Serb Association of the Missing Persons in the Eastern Sarajevo region. He was arrested and charged for publicly describing the Srebrenica genocide as "God's punishment". In a first-instance verdict, the Court of Bosnia and Herzegovina acquitted Mandić and Elta employees, and the Appeals Chamber of the Court of BiH confirmed the first-instance verdict.

<sup>5</sup> Full remarks here: <https://www.un.org/sg/en/content/sg/statement/2015-07-01/secretary-generals-remarks-high-level-commemorative-event-srebrenica>.

and called on the European Commission to commemorate the anniversary. On the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Srebrenica Genocide, the EP once again confirmed the importance of commemoration and acknowledged the importance of genocide prevention, stressing the importance of war crimes prosecution at domestic and international levels. The 2015 actions by the EP were in anticipation and in response to the UN Security Council not being able to pass a resolution to call the crimes committed in Srebrenica a ‘genocide’ as a result of the Russian veto.

Further, Congressman Chris Smith (R-NJ), co-chair of the Congressional Caucus on Bosnia, introduced a new resolution on Bosnia and Herzegovina, H. Res. 310, marking the 20th anniversary of the Srebrenica Genocide in 2015. The resolution, co-sponsored by 14 Republicans and 14 Democrats, passed unanimously, defining the events as a genocide by the U.S. Congress as well. At the opening of an exhibit honoring the work of the MoS in Strasbourg in 2019, two of its representatives, Munira Subašić and Kada Hotić, called on the Council of Europe to mark July 11 as Srebrenica Memorial Day. Dunja Mijatović, the Council of Europe’s Human Rights Commissioner, reiterated, “I join my voice to yours. For too long, the international community has looked away. The time has come to take sides and march with you to replace the seeds of hate with those of justice.”<sup>6</sup>

Nearly 25 years since the Srebrenica Genocide, the MoS have continued efforts to combat genocide denial through public diplomacy. Most recently, they started a petition to revoke the Nobel Award for Literature to Austrian author Peter Handke in the months and days leading up to the ceremony in Stockholm in December 2019. Handke, an apologist of the Milošević regime and a genocide denier, elicited widespread anger in BiH and across the world when he was announced as the winner of the 2019 prize. Moreover, his continued rebuff to answer questions related to Srebrenica and to insult journalists who tried to question him about his refusal to acknowledge the genocide in Srebrenica only led to escalation.<sup>7</sup>

The Mothers’ petition gathered over 20,000 signatures within a day and was promoted by journalists, diaspora members, and activists around the world.<sup>8</sup> The women protested in the month leading up to the event in front of the Swedish Embassy in Sarajevo, including during a visit by the Swedish princess to BiH, and in front of the event in Stockholm the day of the ceremony when it was ultimately awarded. Multiple other victim groups’ associations and activists joined them in condemning the award being awarded to Handke, thus engaging multiple non-state actors in pursuing a culture of remembrance and acknowledgement of the genocide. Moreover, Bosniak politicians and local institutions supported and followed the MoS lead in protesting.<sup>9</sup>

The women have sought out different avenues and pursued efforts throughout the world in order to combat genocide denial and received international recognition of the Srebrenica Genocide beyond convictions in international judicial institutions. It is clear that their persistent advocacy efforts continue at multiple levels, including with international organizations beyond the borders of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

6 For more info, please see: <https://balkaninsight.com/2019/06/26/council-of-europe-urged-to-back-srebrenica-remembrance-day/>.

7 Peter Maas reported widely about the scandal as it was ongoing. For more information, see <https://theintercept.com/staff/peter-maass/>.

8 For more info, see <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/10/mothers-srebrenica-call-handke-nobel-prize-revoked-191011151355728.html>.

9 Some of the letters written in protest can be accessed here: <https://www.documentcloud.org/documents/6558311-Swedish-Academy-Letter-to-Murat-Tahirovic.html>. The leader of the major Bosniak party, Bakir Izetbegović, also openly criticized awarding Handke, using harsh language including calling him an ‘intellectual vampire.’ For more info, see <https://avaz.ba/vijesti/bih/534325/izetbegovic-za-trt-handke-je-intelektualac-vampir-a-dodjela-nobelove-na-grade-njemu-je-sramota-za-civilizirani-svijet>. For comments from Denis Zvizdić, former Chairman of the House of Representatives of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Vice President of SDA, please see <https://okanal.oslobodjenje.ba/vijesti/zvizdic-prokoментарisao-dodjelu-nobelove-nagrade-hendkeu/2337/>.

## Conclusion

The Mothers of Srebrenica have managed to project a particular niche foreign policy image of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Their continued work around creating a culture of remembrance and gaining recognition for the Srebrenica Genocide domestically, regionally, and internationally, as well as condemning those who refuse to acknowledge the genocide, have become a recognizable aspect of BiH's image abroad. Though advocacy, social movement-motivated engagement, and by predominantly collaborating with other non-state actors in the country and outside of its borders, the women have managed to steer, support, and run in parallel with state diplomatic practice. They have acted in a cohesive manner, while the Bosnian state, in large part due to its complicated set-up and ongoing post-conflict political tensions, has been unable to do so. The MoS are representative of the 'intermestic' approach of cultural and public diplomacy engagement.

We outlined three types of engagement. The women firstly have engaged with judicial institutions to help establish a record of what happened in Srebrenica on multiple levels in the pursuit of accountability. Meanwhile, they have worked on creating a locally embedded and globally recognized culture of remembrance through symbolic actions, such as wearing the Srebrenica flower and organizing the annual commemoration and annual burial services in Srebrenica. Finally, they have pursued international recognition of the Srebrenica Genocide in order to establish a culture of commemoration in BiH and the world. They have called out genocide denial across the world by protesting and collaborating with others to raise awareness about what happened in Srebrenica. While their actions have had the tacit approval of a number of Bosnian state actors, this has not necessarily been reflected in official state policy due to ongoing post-conflict processes and local contestation, which has limited how the state pursues public diplomacy.

This article demonstrates how the Mothers have taken on the role of public diplomacy actors abroad as tensions inside the country and competing political narratives have continued to dominate. They are demonstrative of the role of strong advocacy in public diplomacy in post-conflict settings. Over time, they have emphasized the importance of commemorating the Srebrenica Genocide across the world.

Future work should consider the implications of such actors in public diplomacy in other post-conflict or transition settings. As the MoS have demonstrated, their soft power skills can mobilize individuals and institutional actors on multiple levels, leading to foreign policy and public diplomacy results. This case study brings to the forefront the potential and influence of intermestic non-state actors in weak and post-conflict countries to exert their influence over political processes on multiple levels and with different actors. This scholarship can help to better grasp how these states respond to the different internal and external pressures in their foreign policy decision-making processes and capacities.

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