

Use and Misuse of Historical Narratives: Local Expressions, Global Connections

**11-14 NOVEMBER 2025 | SARAJEVO, BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA
HOTEL EUROPE**

12 NOVEMBER

MORNING PROGRAMME

8:30am Arrival. Coffee and Fruits.

8:45am Welcoming: **Vibeke Moe**, Senior Researcher
The Norwegian Center for Holocaust and Minority Studies

9:00am Presentation: *Legal Bulwarks against Hate: From the Virtual Realm to the Courtroom*, **Adam Mendelsohn**

9:30am Presentation: *Narratives about the Russo-Ukrainian War on Norwegian Alternative News Site Steigan.no*, **Vibeke Moe**

10:00am Coffee Break, Coffee and Fruits

10:15am Presentation: *Remembering Srebrenica in Sarajevo: Urban Observations*, **Jakub Salihović**

10:45am Presentation: *Srebrenica Genocide in History Textbooks of Bosnia and Herzegovina*, **Melisa Forić Plasto**

11:15am Presentation: *Learning from Conflict: Teaching Northern Ireland's Troubles in a Bosnian Context*, **Lejla Mulalić**

11:45pm Discussion & Reflections

12:00pm Lunch Break



EVENING PROGRAMME

1:00pm Presentation: *Holocaust Memory: A Comparative Perspective in Norway & Sweden*, **Karoll Andrea Ciceri**

1:30pm Presentation: *The Instrumentalization of World War II Memory in Russian Aggression Against Ukraine*, **Ruslan Kavatsiuk**

2:00pm Presentation: *Perpetrators: Why do They Kill?*, **Alexander Hinton**

2:30pm Discussion & Reflections

2:45pm Coffee Break, Coffee and Fruits.

3:00pm Presentation: *When Religion Comes in Handy: An Attempt to Answer Why Prejudices Towards Muslims are so Persistent in a Country like Norway*, **Cora Alexa Døving**

3:30pm Presentation: *Narrative Construction of the Denial of Srebrenica Genocide – Case Study of the Rhetoric of Milorad Dodik*, **Denisa Sarajlić**

4:00pm Presentation: *Responding to Hate: Connecting Past and Present – Historical Analogies and Presentism in Studying the Holocaust – The IHRA Partnership Series as a Case Study*, **Tali Nates**

4:30pm Panel: *The Role of Education in the Construction of Historical Narratives*

- *“Holocaust & Peace”: Inclusive Memorialization and Peace Education in Post-Conflict Bosnia and Herzegovina*, **Velma Šarić**
- *The Cartography of Forgetting: Curricular Contestation and the National Project to Redact the Past*, **Nela Navarro-LaPointe**

Chair: Vibeke Moe

5:30pm Reflections & Closing



13 NOVEMBER

Full day tour trip to *Srebrenica Memorial Center*

Meeting Point: Reception *Hotel Europe*. 7:50 A.M.

Supported by Norway



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SPEAKERS



Professor Adam D. Mendelsohn holds the Isidore and Theresa Cohen Chair in Jewish Civilisation at the University of Cape Town where he is Director of the *Kaplan Centre for Jewish Studies* and Head of the *Department of Historical Studies*. The Centre, the only of its kind in Africa, conducts research focused on Jews in southern Africa, past and present.

Legal Bulwarks against Hate: From the Virtual Realm to the Courtroom

This paper is the third in a sequence that have explored hate speech on social media in South Africa. The first paper described the findings of a study on racism, xenophobia, and antisemitism, highlighting the curious popularity of tropes relating to Nazism and the Holocaust. The second focused exclusively on antisemitic content on *Facebook*, *X*, *TikTok* and *Instagram* following October 2023. This revealed the widespread presence of antisemitism on social media, far in excess of that found previously. Much of this was of the classical variety, or involved Holocaust distortion and denial. This third paper reports on new strategic initiatives developed in response to the proliferation of antisemitic content on social media. These initiatives draw on opportunities presented by South African legal frameworks. In theory, the court system offers robust protections against hate speech. This paper will outline these strategies and assess early evidence of their prospects for success.



SPEAKERS



Vibeke Moe is a senior researcher at the Norwegian Center for Holocaust and Minority Studies, situated in Oslo, Norway. Her research focuses on contemporary antisemitism, Jewish history and Holocaust memory, Islamophobia, and Muslim-Jewish relations. Moe holds a PhD in Religious Studies from the University of Oslo. Her doctoral thesis explored narratives about Jews among Muslims in contemporary Norway. Moe is head of the research project *Dynamics of hate: local manifestations of a global phenomenon* (2023-2025), funded by the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Narratives About the Russo-Ukrainian War on Norwegian Alternative News Site Steigan.no

References to “Nazism” are part of Russian propaganda against Ukraine in the Russo-Ukrainian war. In this presentation, Vibeke Moe explores such references in the Norwegian context focusing on narrative patterns in articles published between February 2022 and June 2025 on the online platform Steigan.no. Through its founder, the platform has historical connections to the political far left but can currently be described as part of the alternative news media and as critical to the political leadership in Norway. Moe demonstrates how the website positions itself against descriptions in mainstream media and how narratives about the war draw on portrayals of Ukraine found in Russian propaganda. She will explore a set of core narratives and rhetorical strategies connected to how the war is discussed and what is described as the rationale behind the war. The analysis will particularly look at how central elements in these descriptions constitute forms of Holocaust distortion by misusing historical narratives and by inverting the roles of victim and perpetrator. Norway has a history of widespread support for notions that represent variations of Holocaust distortion. This context constitutes an important backdrop for the narratives on Steigan.no and may facilitate the acceptance of pro-Russian narratives on Steigan.no.



SPEAKERS



Jakub Salihović (UK, 1992) studied English Literature and Philosophy at the University of Sheffield before completing his M.A. in European Culture and Thought at University College London. He has taught in the English departments at Aix-Marseille Université and the University of Sarajevo, as well as at the École Nationale Supérieure d'Architecture in Marseille. He is actively involved in Sarajevo's arts and culture sector.

Remembering Srebrenica in Sarajevo: Urban Observations

This presentation examines how the memory of the Srebrenica genocide is inscribed into the urban fabric of Sarajevo through official monuments, murals, street names, roundabouts, and public squares. Drawing on photographic and site-based research, it traces the institutional approach to commemoration and the visual and textual language through which Srebrenica is remembered — and, at times, forgotten — in the capital's public space. In response to the gaps and tensions identified through this research, the presentation also gestures toward possible interventions into the commemorative landscape, developed in dialogue with comparative memorial practices and spatial design thinking. Alongside a visual narrative, the presentation reflects on how the memory of Srebrenica might be more meaningfully integrated into public space — and what current practices reveal about the politics and aesthetics of remembrance



SPEAKERS



Melisa Forić Plasto is an Assistant Professor at the Department of History, Faculty of Philosophy, University of Sarajevo. She earned her Ph.D. in Modern and Contemporary history at University of Zagreb with topic „Politics of education in Bosnia and Herzegovina on example of history teaching (1992-2018)“. She is a member of BiH History Teachers' Association – EUROCLIO HIP BIH, and Centre for peace education of the University of Sarajevo. Actively participated several international projects dedicated the history education, culture of remembrance, and peace education in Bosnia and Herzegovina and region. Field of interests history teaching didactics, contemporary history of Bosnia and Herzegovina, education policy, politics of education and politics of history, textbooks and peace education.

Srebrenica Genocide in History Textbooks of Bosnia and Herzegovina

For more than thirty years three ethno-national education systems – Bosnian, Croatian and Serbian – have existed on the territory of Bosnia and Herzegovina. The wars of the 1990s represent one of the most controversial topics in history textbooks in Bosnia and Herzegovina, as they are presented from three national and contested interpretations.

Genocide of Srebrenica as the one of the most discussed themes is presented contested with selective presentation of facts, interpretations from an ethno-national perspective, relativization and denial. Denial of war crimes and court verdicts on one side and exclusive emphasis on the role of victims on the other side. New generations of young people are growing up on exclusive and contested narratives, which creates the basis for further deepening of divisions in the society of Bosnia and Herzegovina.



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SPEAKERS



Lejla Mulalić is an Associate Professor at the Department of English Language and Literature, Faculty of Philosophy, University of Sarajevo. Her main areas of research are: contemporary British and specifically Scottish literature, vulnerability studies and ethics of care, the conceptual and pedagogical underpinnings of historical fiction and the role of literature, history and culture studies in peace education. She is a member of the Coordinating Team of the Peace Education Hub (University of Sarajevo - Faculty of Philosophy) whose aim is to develop the culture of peacebuilding with our students and in-service teachers through educational initiatives and collaborative research in peace building pedagogies.

Learning from Conflict: Teaching Northern Ireland's Troubles in a Bosnian Context

This presentation explores the pedagogical approaches to teaching the contested legacy of Northern Ireland's Troubles, while contextualising the teaching within the socio-political realities of post-conflict Bosnia and Herzegovina. It examines the use of a "Real Stories" documentary *Divided and Damaged: Northern Ireland's Peace Walls (Borders Documentary)* as well as short educational films on bystanding and conflict made by Corrymeela organisation, with first-year students of English language and literature at the University of Sarajevo. These teaching resources underline the importance of storytelling and community work in dismantling the us vs. them perspective. Additionally, they show how murals can promote sectarianism through a binary approach, but also highlight their transformative potential in connecting communities across peace wall boundaries—and even internationally, as demonstrated by the 2024 "Painting for Palestine" project in Belfast.

The presentation draws parallels with post-war Bosnia and Herzegovina, where ethnic divisions remain deeply entrenched, and asks whether any lessons can be learned from Northern Ireland's Troubles. By creating a safe space in which the students can indirectly approach the contested past of Bosnia and Herzegovina, it is hoped that they will be encouraged to think beyond the content they are taught and thus critically examine the concepts of war, peace and reconciliation.



SPEAKERS



Karoll Andrea Ciceri Burbano works as a research assistant at the Norwegian Center for Holocaust and Minority Studies (HL-senteret). She has a background in legal studies and holds a Master's degree in human Rights and Multiculturalism from the University of South-Eastern Norway. Her research explores the intersections between human rights, international relations, and development.

Holocaust Memory: A Comparative Perspective in Norway & Sweden

The memory of the Holocaust is not static but continuously constructed, negotiated, and reinterpreted. In the postwar period, states developed distinct forms of remembrance, creating multiple narratives of the past. In Norway and Sweden, patriotic narratives were mobilized in nation-building processes and in the formation of national identities. Since the 1990s, Holocaust memory has increasingly served as a foundation for universal, human rights-based frameworks, while localized frameworks of remembrance have continued to coexist alongside them.

In this presentation, I compare the development of Holocaust memory in Norway and Sweden. For this purpose, I identify the construction, reproduction, and contestation of narratives, and examine how these have been expressed through various forms of social memory, including books, films, museums, and monuments. This analysis builds on Holmila & Kvist Geverts' (2011) adaptation of Levy & Sznajder's (2006) typology of Holocaust memory in the Nordic context.



SPEAKERS



Ruslan Kavatsiuk is the manager of the "Ukrainian History: Global Initiative", as well as the operations director in Ukraine of the French organization "Yahad - In Unum", which collects evidence of war crimes committed by russians against Ukrainians in cooperation with the Ministry of Justice of Ukraine. Ruslan also manages defence projects of the Spirit of America in Ukraine. Before the full-scale invasion, he worked as the deputy CEO of the Babyn Yar Holocaust Memorial Center, being responsible for academic studies. Ruslan is a former adviser to the Deputy Prime Minister of Ukraine for European and Euro-Atlantic Integration of Ukraine and adviser to the Chief of the General Staff of the Armed Forces of Ukraine (2015-2017). As a co-founder of the Hybrid Warfare Analytical Group at the Ukraine Crisis Media Center, Ruslan was engaged in researching russian propaganda narratives about Ukraine and other countries of Europe and North America. In 2010-2014, Ruslan was the head of corporate and government affairs and a member of the board of management of Mondelez Ukraine (formerly Kraft Foods).

The Instrumentalization of World War II Memory in Russian Aggression Against Ukraine

Russia's 2022 invasion of Ukraine under the pretext of "denazification" surprised many observers, yet this rhetoric emerged earlier during the 2014 annexation of Crimea. Under Putin's leadership, Victory Day commemorations (May 9) have evolved into Russia's paramount national celebration, superseding even major religious holidays. This elevation of the Great Patriotic War narrative serves as a foundational myth for the *Russkiy Mir* (Russian World) ideology. Contemporary Russian propaganda systematically constructs an image of pervasive neo-Nazi influence within the "Collective West," positioning Ukraine as a hostile Western instrument threatening Russia. This discourse justified both the 2014 intervention—framed as protecting Russian-speaking populations from a "Nazi regime in Kyiv"—and the 2022 full-scale invasion. This presentation examines how the Kremlin weaponizes historical memory, demonstrating the convergence between propagandistic narratives and concrete Russian foreign policy. It analyzes how appropriated WWII rhetoric legitimizes contemporary authoritarian governance and military aggression, revealing the deliberate distortion of anti-fascist legacy to serve expansionist objectives.



SPEAKERS



Alex Hinton is Distinguished Professor of Anthropology and Director of the Center for the Study of Genocide and Human Rights at Rutgers University. He is the award-winning author or editor of seventeen books, including, most recently, *It Can Happen Here: White Power and the Rising Threat of Genocide in the US* (NYU, 2021), *Anthropological Witness: Lessons from the Khmer Rouge Tribunal* (Cornell, 2022), and *Perpetrators: Encountering Humanity's Dark Side* (Stanford, 2023).


Perpetrators: Why Do They Kill?

Why do perpetrators kill? For many people, the answer is clear: evil deeds are done by evil people. Evidence of this seeming truism appears everywhere. History books teach us about despots like Hitler, Stalin, Pol Pot, and Mao. Every day, the media reports on the excesses of extremism and the ravages of war. Indeed, evil would seem to be most clearly revealed in such extremes of human destructiveness, especially genocide. Drawing on decades of research on this issue, including interviews with former guards, executioners, and torturers, Alex Hinton's talk will explore this dark side of humanity and whether there is more to the story about the nature of human evil.



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SPEAKERS



Cora Alexa Døving is a Research professor at The Norwegian Center for Holocaust and Minority Studies. Her field of research is conditions for minorities in Norway, Racism, Islamophobia and Antisemitism. She was the project leader of Negotiating Jewish Identity – Jewish Life in 21st Century Norway funded by The Norwegian Research Council. Now she leads the project Map and Terrain an interview-based study with Jews in Norway, aiming to gain insight into the experiential dimensions of antisemitism. She is also part of the research team behind the HL-Center's attitude surveys on attitudes towards Jews and Muslims (2017, 2022, 2024 and the forthcoming 2025-2027).

When Religion Comes in Handy: An Attempt to Answer Why Prejudices Towards Muslims Are So Persistent in a Country Like Norway

Longitude surveys shows that negative attitudes towards Muslims are remarkably stably widespread in Norway. Why is this the case in a country with few conflicts and a well-integrated Muslim population? Theories of prejudices might help to explain why some prejudices have a longer lifespan than others: When a prejudice is potent it is because of a relationship between the content of the prejudice and an empirical reality (though the prejudice is not true because of it). When this type of prejudice is part of populist politics it seems to gain longevity. The main claim in this talk is that the rhetoric of the Progress party, Norway's second-largest party, has created a space for openly showing negative attitudes towards Muslims while simultaneously distancing from the far-right.



SPEAKERS



Denisa Sarajlić is a political scientist and practitioner working at the intersection of democratisation, democratic backsliding, political polarisation, and governance reform in post-conflict societies. She holds a PhD from the University of Bath, where her research examined the limits of EU normative power in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Her current academic work explores divisive political narratives, ethnic entrepreneurship, and the erosion of trust in democratic institutions. In 2025, she was a Visiting Scholar at Harvard University's Weatherhead Center for International Affairs, she is also a Chevening Alumna. Alongside her academic career, Denisa has extensive experience in international development, leading governance, decentralisation, and EU accession projects across the Western Balkans and Eastern Europe. She previously served as Deputy Minister of Civil Affairs of Bosnia and Herzegovina and as Director of the Foreign Policy Initiative BH, a leading Sarajevo-based think-tank. She currently leads a consultancy company SKRIPTA that works on different aspects of governance, democratisation, gender equality, diversity and inclusion.

Narrative Construction of the Denial of the Srebrenica Genocide: A Case Study of the Rhetoric of Milorad Dodik

This paper analyses the narrative agency of ethnic entrepreneurs in post-conflict societies through a case study of Milorad Dodik's denial of the Srebrenica genocide. Applying a thick constructivist and discourse-analytic lens, it explores how Dodik's rhetoric constructs counter-norms to reconciliation by mobilising language, emotion, and identity. The analysis identifies three dimensions of denial: numerical, discursive, and temporal-spatial, which are used to relativise genocide intent, redefine victimhood, and legitimise divisions. Drawing on Bar-Tal's framework of societal beliefs essential for reconciliation, the paper shows how Dodik's narratives invert tolerance, recognition, and trust into exclusion, delegitimation, and fear. In doing so, they transform denial from a reactive stance into a coherent political project of identity mobilisation and trust particularisation. The findings illustrate how narrative agency functions as a strategic tool of ethnic entrepreneurs to sustain division and obstruct interethnic cooperation, revealing the power of discourse in shaping post-conflict political realities.



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SPEAKERS



Tali Nates is the founder and director of the *Johannesburg Holocaust & Genocide Centre* (JHGC), a historian who lectures internationally on Holocaust and genocide education, memory, reconciliation, and human rights. Born to a family of Holocaust survivors, her father and uncle were saved by Oskar Schindler. Tali has been involved in the creation and production of dozens of documentary films, curated exhibitions, published articles and contributed chapters to books. She won many awards in South Africa and globally, the latest were the Goethe Medal (2022, Germany), the Secretary of State International Religious Freedom Award (2023, USA) and the International Network of Genocide Scholars' Impact Award (2024).

***Responding to hate: Connecting Past and Present –
Historical Analogies and Presentism in Studying the
Holocaust – The IHRA Partnership Series as a Case Study***

In this paper, the project “Othering, Occupation, Violence, and Denial: Connecting Past and Present”, a collaboration between the Johannesburg Holocaust & Genocide Centre, Eastern European Holocaust Studies, Ukraina Moderna, and Austrian Service Abroad, will be discussed. It explored how historical analogies and presentism in Holocaust studies can promote deeper understanding of the Holocaust, armed conflicts, and the rise of hate speech, while addressing oversimplifications, distortions, and denial. After a rigorous call for papers, six webinars were hosted in 2025 together with four podcasts. All transcripts were published in Ukrainian in Ukraina Moderna and full papers will be published in English at the Eastern European Holocaust Studies Journal in 2026. Learning from international experts, the themes are in the process of being integrated into educational programmes targeting educators, students and many others. An impact survey was conducted to evaluate participant engagement, long-term awareness, and the project’s role in safeguarding historical memory and fostering critical reflection.



SPEAKERS



Velma Šarić is an award-winning human rights defender, journalist, and producer with over 20 years of experience in transitional justice and reconciliation in the Western Balkans. She is the Founder and President of the Post-Conflict Research Center and Editor-in-Chief of Balkan Diskurs. A Columbia University and Robert Bosch Fellow, Velma completed the Alliance for Historical Dialogue and Accountability Program. She holds an MA in Political Science from the University of Sarajevo and has worked with organizations including the Institute for Research of Crimes Against Humanity, Institute for War and Peace Reporting, Atlantic Initiative and the WARM Foundation. She currently serves as the Leonard and Sophie Davis Genocide Prevention Fellow at the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum's Simon-Skjoldt Center.

"Holocaust & Peace": Inclusive Memorialization and Peace Education in Post-Conflict Bosnia and Herzegovina

This presentation introduces the development, impact, and future vision of the pedagogical manual "Holocaust & Peace – Lessons from the Past for the Future", a collaborative Peace Education initiative designed to support inclusive, fact-based teaching of difficult histories in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH). Emerging from a seven-year process involving educators, civil society organizations, and regional and international experts, the manual is a concrete response to the challenges of exclusive narratives, segregated schooling, and politicized memory that continue to affect BiH's post-war society.

Comprising four interdisciplinary modules—history, human rights, culture of remembrance, and language, literature and arts—the manual equips teachers with practical tools and methodologies to engage students in critical reflection on the causes and consequences of mass atrocities, including the Holocaust, while drawing connections to the 1990s wars in the Balkans. It promotes multi-perspectivity, empathy, and civic responsibility in classrooms still shaped by division and historical denial.

The presentation reflects on the pedagogical strategies employed—both direct and indirect engagement with controversial issues—and highlights the pilot phase, teacher feedback, and eventual institutionalization of the manual into the Sarajevo Canton curriculum starting in the 2023/2024 academic year. It also outlines the next steps: scaling the initiative to other Cantons, Brčko District, and Republika Srpska, with the goal of making Peace Education an integral part of BiH's formal education system.



SPEAKERS

Nela Navarro-LaPointe is an Associate Teaching Professor in the Department of English at Rutgers University, the State University of New Jersey and Director of Education, Associate Director, and member of the CGHR UNESCO Executive Committee at the Center for the Study of Genocide and Human Rights (CGHR) at Rutgers. Her research interests include language and social justice, linguistic discrimination, linguicide, writing studies, language rights, new literacies studies, critical pedagogy, arts across the curriculum, digital humanities, educational reform, comparative global education, human rights, genocide, and peace education. A recipient of Rutgers University's Presidential Award for Excellence in Teaching (2021), she regularly contributes to rights-based curriculum and professional development initiatives. She is an editor for the Rutgers University Press book series "Genocide, Human Rights, and Political Violence", translator *Towards a Just Society: The Personal Journeys of Human Rights Educators*, (University of Minnesota 2015), co-author of *Translingual Identities and Transnational Realities in the College Classroom* (Routledge 2020) and *Advancing Socially Driven Scholarship: The STAR Scholar Certified Researcher Training Program* (Star Scholars 2023).

The Cartography of Forgetting: Curricular Contestation and the National Project to Redact the Past

Beginning in early January 2025 current curriculum reforms in U.S. department of education—particularly in states like Florida and Texas—represent a critical, localized expression of historical narrative misuse. These shifts, which include downplaying the systemic nature of slavery, rejection of diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging pedagogy, narrowing civil rights enforcement, censorship, book banning, and removing instructional guidance for English Language Learners, reflect a policy agenda intended to align with the ideological mandates of Project 2025. This conservative blueprint advocates for the dismantling of the federal education apparatus and the promotion of a centralized, "traditional" narrative. This presentation analyzes these state-level actions as a systematic attempt to redact the past in the public education sphere. By examining how contested narratives are mobilized through textbooks and standards, the analysis situates this U.S. "national project" within the seminar's global framework. This presentation explores how the deliberate narrowing of history to shape national memory, identity, and democratic citizenship has parallels with narrative control observed in other international socio-political contexts.