

Project:

ICTY ORAL History - Documented by SENSE

An Interview with

Hanne Sophie Greve

SENSE Transitional Justice Center

Pula, Croatia

2023

Interviewee: Hanne Sophie Greve (HSG)

Interviewer: Mirko Klarin (MK) and Mina Vidakovic (MV)

Location: The Hague, The Netherlands

Date: 3 December 2018

HSG: Torkel Opsahl was a member and he actually died, almost at his desk, in the Commission. So at the time when it started I was working for the UN in Cambodia, so I wasn't even in Norway or involved on any level from that very early day.

So, I actually came into this, it was an enormous surprise to me, because I was just called and I was asked: "Would you be willing?" And I said I don't know, for one reason, and that is I have heard stories from the former Yugoslavia and the breakup, and they are very sad, very violent. I don't know anything about the conflict and I don't know if I'm strong enough. I've lived in wartime situations, I have been living in the wake of the fall of Southeast Asia, I worked with refugees from Cambodia, Laos, Burma back in 1979 and in end of '79, '80, '81. And I also worked at the Horn of Africa in the midst of the hunger catastrophe. And I had worked also in Namibia or with refugees from Namibia. So I had some experience from war times and I'm not a tough person. So I didn't really know if this was something for me but I decided: "Okay, I will give it a try." And I made an arrangement. My mother was a psychologist, so I'm born into a family where you think that it's useful to seek advice if you need it, and I have some very good friends who run a center for really traumatized people with wartime experiences and so on. And before deciding I called them and I said: "If I fall into pieces will you pick me up and restore me somehow?" And they said: "Yes, we will do that." And then I said: "Okay, I will try, I will see if I'm able to do this. I

don't know, but I will try." And at a very early stage my predecessor had made some preliminary studies, but in my opinion from living in wartime situations there was nothing in that that I could build on to have anything that could be useful for prosecution.

So it happened that Hans Corell, whom you met here, he was a legal chief in the United Nations, and he said: "There is a country where many people have come with a very sad story from the former Yugoslavia. Would you come and read all their statements in this country?" And it so happened that it was I think more than 30 people who had given statements about Prijedor. And this to me formed some kind of a picture that gave me the idea that it would be the best... because I think when joining the war crime commission it was my ambition that whatever I did it should be useful for prosecution, and what I had seen initially was that nothing I saw was, according to my experience from wartime situations, useful to follow up with prosecution. It was very very useful in terms of documentation but for prosecution I didn't see it meet that. So I asked the Commission, I said: "I would very much like to be allowed to study Prijedor", because I think that in a modern war to understand the wartime situation you need to have not only sort of a focus on what happened, say, to the elite, or the women, or this group or that group. What you need is simply to have like a bird's eyes view on everything. And the statements I had read from Prijedor gave me a sense that it would be possible. If I studied all that had happened in Prijedor, absolutely everything for everyone, that perhaps I would start to understand how things had gone wrong in Bosnia.

And the Commission was perhaps slightly hesitant but agreed that I could make this study. And I was very lucky in the sense that my predecessor had an excellent and

outstanding assistant, that was Morten Bergsmo, whom you know from here, and I, so to speak, inherited him. And we worked extremely well together. He is very hard working, excellently qualified, brilliant and he has very good ethics. And the three of them is what I appreciate the most. So from word go we could work extremely well together.

And I had previously worked for the High Commission for Refugees so I asked the High Commissioner's Office for a meeting and I said: "I know there are details you can't share with me, but can you let me know where people from the former Yugoslavia has gone when they have been resettled?" And this way I got to know that people from Prijedor were in four different parts of the world, different continents. I'm an old undertaker from working with refugees - I didn't want to create more harm than the people had already been subjected to. So from the very beginning it was very important to me to take very careful precautions not to cause any harm to anyone. But I set up a system whereby I decided I will have people interviewed across the globe simultaneously. I will provide, I asked... in one country it could be immigration officials, in another country it could be police, in a third country it could be people who who simply volunteered, but they would be provided with maps, they would be provided with outlines of certain things that were known and they were asked to interview a huge number of people simultaneously, so that when people would give information in Asia they wouldn't know what someone would said in Europe or elsewhere, meaning that actually... Initially I did perhaps not think that it was as bad as others were saying. And I should perhaps say that my maternal grandfather had been honored in the past by Serbia and that was because during the Russian revolution he had worked with Norwegian delegation in Petrograd and at that time he had smuggled out a Serbian or a former Yugoslav princess. Her husband was killed but he had brought her to

Stockholm to safety. So he was rewarded for this and of course as a tiny girl you almost see this princess with a crown. So, if I had any knowledge of former Yugoslavia, it was a nice picture of a Serbian princess. Of course, that's a child's version of everything. Unfortunately, my grandfather was a prisoner with the resistance, a prisoner of the Nazis, and then the family destroyed, when he was captured, the family destroyed anything that had to do with Serbia and Russia and all of this in order that his problems wouldn't be increased by that. And he died when I was only six. I was very close to him. But I didn't know anything of the former Yugoslavia, I must admit. But when I started reading these statements - and Morten was very important to me in helping to coordinate all of this - it was as if people spoke with one voice because from very different areas they would come up with exactly the same, not only the general picture but almost by the hour we were almost able to reconstruct. You can see it because it's an annex to the report made on how everything went wrong in the Prijedor area. And then I actually woke up one morning crying and it had occurred to me - this is genocide, no less. So, the report was called Massive crimes against humanity and most probably genocide. And I also had the advantage of having worked in the past with the Red Cross, the International Commission of the Red Cross. And they do have secrecy and they do indeed take very well care of their secrecy, so I didn't want to intrude on that, but I saw the Red Cross and I said: "I know you can tell me nothing but if I'm on a very wrong track, according to what you know, please do let me know." And that kind of understanding brought me further. And I tried to consult, contact, be in touch with - myself and also through Morten - everyone and anyone that could possibly have anything to say. And I must say that the single most significant outside source was Roy Gutman and his early reports. Later there were reporters who worked for British media etc who were significant but the

single one who actually made a difference when it came to Prijedor was Roy Gutman and his early reports. And he was a cooperative man, he was well qualified. No one at the time were encouraged to dramatize, there was no need to dramatize but sometimes when you interview people who've been subject to something very, very bad there is a tendency to. I should say from the very beginning when people were interviewed, for one, every person who was interviewed had a number and a name code linked to them and these were put in sealed envelopes kept by the government in the country where they were staying. And when the evidence was provided to me and later for the Tribunal they were not allowed to know either country or name of the witness. But if the Tribunal, it was so arranged that if the Tribunal wanted to speak with witness 100 from country Z they could ask the country if a witness 100 from country X is willing to meet with the Tribunal. It was so arranged that no one were obliged to do more than to give information to the Commission. They could be asked later but then it was open to them, if they felt safe enough, if they thought they could. Of course many were willing to do this later, but they were not obliged. And it was very important to make sure that this was not something they had to do. And on one occasion I went to a city and I met many women who had been raped and I said: "I need to know more about it, I don't ask you if you have been raped but if you know about rape or someone else who have raped. I don't need to know their names but I need to understand." And I sat down and spent a lot of time with them and got the picture of how things have happened in Omarska and so on. And this way, by collecting any and every source we possibly could and trying to read and read and read and understand the history, the geography, the background, everything, little by little it all came together and ended up in the Prijedor report.

At an early stage I was also asked if I myself would go into the Office of the Prosecutor in the Tribunal and I was adamant: "That would not be a good idea." But I had groomed Morten to go that way. He was in on everything, always a shared thing. Of course, we worked in different countries, but we were in a very close contact and everything I did I shared with him. We had a very good rapport between us, and it was from word go clear to me that to be able to bring this further I would need someone who knew everything from inside and that person should go to the Tribunal. And Morten was ready and willing to go to the Tribunal. So there was throughout a plan, nothing was done sort of "what happens". It was: let's try to see if this is as alleged very bad, how bad, how come, can it be documented. And every little thing that could possibly be documented was taken care of for documentation purposes. And it was really step by step, all was intended to reach to prosecution. Since I've worked as a judge, since I've worked in wartime situations it means that you know that you need to have evidence. Some women's group criticized me and said: "You must focus on crimes against women, rape, so many rapes". And I said: "Not in isolation." I shall indeed focus also on rape, but if I can document, think of a number, ten thousand rapes, people may say, you know, it's a breakdown in the normal order in a society, and then I could have nothing for prosecution. But if I could see how this fitted into a pattern of destruction we were able to document it as being just that - war crimes. So, everything was from word go designed for seeing if it was as alleged, what was the size of it, what were the consequences of it and if it was really bad as I very soon came to conclude, it definitely had to be so prepared and taken care of that it was leading straight up to a court case.

MK: So did you yourself go to the region to visit Prijedor?

HSG: No, no. I wanted to but the UN would not let me in because at the time the authorities locally said they would not guarantee my safety. I knew enough about war to know that that was not the main issue if I had been there or if I had seen exactly where is the location of Keraterm or Omarska. That doesn't really matter. What matters is that someone who were there at a time were able to point out exactly what happened. So I was saying: "Okay, I'm prepared to go, I'm willing to go, but if I'm not allowed to go it makes no difference." And the very interesting thing is that I checked with every possible person, institution, entity that worked in the area and actually the day before we had the final decision in the Commission I also met with Serbian diplomats and I put up the map and I said: "My understanding is that this this this exactly this is the way it happened. Do you want to add, to tell me I'm wrong? Do you want to... I'm here to listen." And they said: "We think you have a good case."

And the very interesting thing is also that when the report had been delivered, at that time there were certain papers we didn't have access to, but everything that came in later substantiated the findings. And actually the Prijedor study gave us the key to unlock what had happened in region after region or opstina after opstina. So, by studying one opstina in detail we could understand, and the Tribunal later could start to investigate region for region if there were similarities. And of course unfortunately they were indeed similarities. And I mean, if we look back, we know that many of the similarities are to be found in previous wars. You could look back to the Nazi rule, you could look back at what happened as early as or maybe late, because history repeats itself, but in 1915 with the Armenians. So there were elements to this. I didn't start out looking for these elements, I started by trying to see how does this come together, what information do we have. But

when you look back from a distance, afterwards, you realize that it's a very repetitive pattern as compared to what has happened in previous wars in different areas.

MV: How long does it take? The whole procedure, the whole investigation that you do?

HSG: It didn't take so much time in terms of months because I actually started in autumn and finished the next summer. But we didn't have more time. And in my opinion then, maybe I became a bit stubborn, but I decided that, because there were strong forces that didn't want the Tribunal and I knew for sure Prijedor would be suitable for prosecution, so I decided: Never mind, I shall make every effort that I can to see this through. So, in the final weeks, maybe six weeks, then I was working to like six o'clock in the morning, went home from the office, through the shower, had some food, slept for an hour, back in the office at half past nine. I was working around the clock. And Morten was excellent as assistant. But that was really fighting against time. But then, you can't see so much suffering, see in the meaning come to know about so much suffering without being willing to take up some responsibility.

MK: You said something about the contribution of some Western journalists, like Roy Gutman, Ed Vulliamy, Ed Marshall...

HSG: Ed Vulliamy, we had no touch.

MK: ...I mean in discovering Prijedor.

HSG: I have seen that he has come up later to say that it was him, but it was Roy Gutman. Ed Vulliamy came... I actually met Ed Vulliamy first time in the Tribunal in The

Hague. He had no contact with the Commission in the early days.

MK: I think you should also give credit to the local media, especially "Kozarski vijesnik", it was an excellent source of information. Have you been surprised how open they have been in explaining what they have been doing?

HSG: I'm pleased to give credit to all local sources. But I couldn't read the languages. That was to me a big disadvantage, of course. But yes, you were right in saying that, because others could. But that would be like a report what they had learned through the media.

MK: Even during your testimony a lot of articles from "Kozarski vijesnik" were introduced as evidence of the case...

HSG: That's correct .

MK: And you confirmed it always. Your explanation of how you reconstructed the events of the 30th of April 1992 was that you read interview with Simo Drljača who explained everything what happened there.

HSG:It's not to leave out the local media, but it was an indirect source for me. But of course we pull it in as well.

MK: That's always helpful if they themselves boast... Okay, the whole report of the Commission is 40-50 pages, the Prijedor part 7-8 pages...

HSG: It's the annex, which is 100 something pages.

MK: And is it a public document?

HSG: Yes.

MK: And the annex?

HSG: Annex 5, I think it's annex 5, it's been out since the day we released it. So you can find it in the UN documents.

MK: One of the things which you especially underlined in this public part of the report was "elitocide". They...

HSG: Singled out a specific group...

MK: Tell me how you concluded that, how you found out that? How do you explain that phenomenon?

HSG: I cannot explain why, I can explain how, in the sense that, for one, you could simply also look as there had been a census, you could look at the census figures of how the population was distributed between different groups. Of course, to me it makes no sense. If in my country we would have said you have Easterners and Westerners and Christians. So it was in itself a very strange thing that you could have Serbs and Croats and Muslims in a census. It would have been much more sensible to say Bosniaks, as they had wanted but were not allowed to. But one very interesting thing is that those who destroyed Prijedor were essentially not locals, they were people who came from the outside to tell the people of Prijedor: "You cannot live together!" Which was a very sad thing to notice. And in the midst of this there was also quite some bravery on behalf of some local Serbs saying: "We cannot accept this." And even women, Serbian women, went demonstrating in front of the hall of the mayor in Prijedor city against Omarska. So, it was outsiders, it was a political

design made on a different level, by different people, and they moved in with the army. But it was with all the paramilitary groups that were really those who destroyed the most.

MK: And one of the weapons which was used was a propaganda of fear, not only of hatred, but of fear. Especially in that area because of the history of the Second World War and so on. And I remember you testifying in Tadić trial and judge McDonald, reading the judgment, said that even Tadić was a victim of propaganda in certain way, he was a victim of that propaganda and the bad things he had done are done because he started himself to believe in that.

HSG: I think fear is a very sad weapon because when everyone starts to look over their shoulders and be afraid of someone else it could turn very bad. That is one reason why our Europe today must work for social cohesion. We make strong social bonds between everyone who live in a community and may try to see it flourish. So, I would like to say perhaps that although the destruction of Prijedor was made by the Serbs, it was made by a political ideology, it was made by political decisions. It's like Nazism and Germans - these are two very different things. And one should be mindful of the fact that there are mixed families, there are so many ties and bonds, and I hope they will be reestablished.

MK: Your conclusion was that crimes have been committed, they were systematic and widespread and with a certain pattern and so on and that it's probably genocide and a lot of people have been indicted for genocide in Prijedor including some commanders of the camps, the president of the crisis staff and things like that, but so far nobody was found guilty for genocide including Karadžić and Mladić. You are a judge, what do you think about that? We are still waiting for the appeal...

HSG: Put it this way, I think that someone who has been involved in investigations and have made preliminary conclusions shall not decide in place of the judges. I leave that completely to them. I have put it forward the way I see it and I have made every effort to substantiate my claims.

MK: And basically you have done one tremendous job for the Tribunal. How are you satisfied with the way the Tribunal has used what you have found or what you have produced in your investigation. Are you satisfied with the way the Tribunal presented the evidence you found and gave to it?

HSG: Again, one should take a rather humble approach to this, in the sense that, for one, initially every indictment was based on Prijedor and it couldn't stay like that, because then people would say: "Well Prijedor, but we need to have a broader picture as well." And the Tribunal needed to look for that. But I am generally pleased with what the Tribunal did do, although I have no sort of inside information as to how they handled everything. I don't know. But I appreciate the fact that when I started my work we didn't even know if there would be a Tribunal. I was once interviewed in Norway on the radio and they said: "Aren't you the biggest fool possible who think there could ever be a tribunal?" And I said: "I'd rather work for what I believe in and move towards that, than give up at the start." But people didn't think there would be a tribunal. And if you look back, this isn't very long time ago after all. And the fact that we now have international tribunals, yes, there are shortcomings, yes, there are things to be improved, but all of a sudden the world at large, the people of the world, have come to realize that: When things go really wrong in my country there could be the possibility of international justice. And in this step-by-step... not

everything is moving straight ahead and in the right pace and there are steps backwards as well, but still - it's fantastic what has happened actually after this, although all shortcomings.

MK: Thank you very much.

HSG: You're welcome

MK: So as the member of the Commission of Experts involved with the preparation of Prijedor dossier how satisfying are you with the way the Tribunal has used those materials in prosecuting those who are the most responsible for those crimes?

MB: I was only an assistant to the Commission, seconded by the Norwegian Foreign Ministry. I was very young so I was not a full member of the Commission like Judge Greve with whom I had the pleasure of working, and before her professor Torkel Opsahl. But looking back, it is extraordinary what those persons who came forward and were willing to give information to the Commission of Experts and later to be interviewed and become witnesses, what they have brought about in terms of international justice development. Because the Prijedor and Bosanska Krajina cases have formed today the core of the legacy of the Yugoslavia Tribunal, factually and legally and analytically. And many of the achievements of the analysts at the International Criminal Court's Office of the Prosecutor today they build directly on the work that was done by analysts at the ICTY Office of the Prosecutor. So the influence of the sacrifices made by these victims who came forward, in terms of the law, in terms of working methods, in terms of developing the whole profession of international criminal justice, has in my opinion been very significant. And that is of course humbling and it feels very meaningful to have been able in some modest way to

contribute to that.

MK: Have you been to Prijedor?

MB: Yes, I have visited 102 of the opštinas of Bosnia and Herzegovina as part of my work for the Yugoslavia Tribunal. I wanted to inform myself properly of the history and geography and culture and society of Bosnia and Herzegovina and other republics of the former Yugoslavia. And fortunately I could visit Prijedor several times.