

# CONTEXT

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*An Orange from Mount Trebević: A Remembrance of Events from Besieged Sarajevo 1992-1996* (English). By Ezudin Kurtovic. Elma Šahbegović, Velida Handžić – Mirica (Trans.). Sarajevo: CNS, 2024. Pp. 212. ISBN 978-9926-555-15-3. \$47.

This book contains a personal diary kept by the author during the Bosnian genocide, with entries spanning the years 1992 through 1994. The diary is divided into five distinct parts, organized in chronological order. Thus, the material in this book relies on the author's own remembered and documented experiences.

Although the book is structured to present memories in chronological order, several themes emerge across different time periods. These include: the pursuit of knowledge as a refuge in uncertain times; spirituality and the reliance on prayer, worship, and faith to survive immense hardship; and the importance of self-rectification.

*The pursuit of knowledge as a refuge in uncertain times:* Early in the book, during the early days of the genocide, the author writes, „I'm reading books and learning English. I am happy to have that opportunity” (p. 39). Throughout the diary, it is clear that the author used the pursuit of knowledge as a source of refuge, both emotionally and intellectually. His exhortation to seek knowledge begins as a personal calling in early entries and later transforms into a broader call for everyone to use knowledge as a means of personal growth. This focus on self-rectification becomes another prominent theme. The author also draws poignant connections between seeking knowledge and achieving spiritual growth (see, for example, p. 113).

*The importance of self-rectification:* Gems containing wisdom earned through hard-earned self-reflection are scattered throughout the book, often found in the footnotes. One such footnote (pp. 129-130) explains the significance of the book's title. Some reflections may seem simple, such as „I am searching for something beautiful in my morning thoughts” (p. 26). Despite their simplicity, such thoughts offer guidance to readers on resisting depression and hopelessness even under the bleakest of circumstances. As previously noted, the transformation from personal aspirations to more universal wisdom is apparent in later sections of the diary. As the war drags on, the author increasingly shifts from personal to

general observations, focusing on preserving his hard-earned wisdom as a survivor of war and sharing it with others.

*Spirituality and reliance on prayer, worship, and faith to survive immense hardship:* The book also aptly illustrates how survivors of violent conflict often evolve in their relationship with spirituality, containing numerous prayers made by the author throughout the multi-year conflict. These prayers not only shed light on the author's hopes and fears but also allow readers to experience moments of spiritual growth alongside him on his journey of survival. The inclusion of sermons delivered during the war offers insight into how religious leaders attempted to support their community while under sustained attack, demonstrating that these leaders did not exploit the crisis for personal gain. Furthermore, the book includes excellent explanations of concepts such as *tassawuf*, *tarbiyyah maarifa*, and *kashf*, which are useful for Sufi practitioners reflecting on spiritual growth. For instance, the author recounts imploring God to use dreams as signs of hope and self-worth amid the degrading conditions around him (p. 104). Such prayers and realizations resonate with others on the spiritual path, even if the reader lacks the lived experience of surviving war.

Recording the testimonies of genocide survivors is clearly of timely essence to the international community. With the long-standing documentation of Holocaust testimony as a historical precedent, more recent efforts to preserve survivors' experiences include the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in Canada. Publications like the one under review contribute to this movement by recording the testimony of survivors of the Bosnian genocide. In doing so, this work deepens our understanding of how humans come to kill one another, including their neighbours, in the name of ideology. It also provides insight into how genocide survivors find meaning and purpose in life during and after protracted violence.

At the intersection of peace studies and oral history collection, this book will be of particular interest to students and scholars of peace and conflict studies, genocide studies, anthropology, and history. However, its audience extends far beyond academia. This book is a perfect companion for travellers visiting Bosnia who wish to learn more about the events of its history. It offers a valuable tool for reflection and deeper understanding before, during, or after visiting Bosnia. With the accessible format and language of both the original manuscript and its translation, this book is suitable for students at both the post-secondary and high school levels. For educators, it provides an excellent didactic tool through which readers and students can observe and experience growth within their own hearts and minds as they reflect on the topics of knowledge, spirituality, community, and self-rectification.

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