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The Politicization of the Genocide Label: Genocide Rhetoric in the UN Security Council

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Individual nations, as well as the United Nations (UN), have been historically reluctant to label and frame a situation genocide.¹ Terms such as “ethnic cleansing” or “genocidal acts,” are common euphemisms for genocide, used to avoid the legally mandated obligation to intervene, to prevent or halt genocides.² The continued diplomatic contention regarding the application of the genocide label is exemplified with respect to the 1915 Armenian genocide. This dispute perpetuates a normalcy to debates over claims of genocide, creating a discourse of denial and divisive politics which becomes synonymous with the application of the genocide label. This historical reluctance to label an act as genocide is also evident in the treatment of the 1994 Rwandan genocide. The Clinton administration in the United States (US) specifically avoided the use of the word genocide in a semantic charade to negate the perceived obligation to “actually do something.”³ Although New Zealand and the Czech Republic entertained the notion of labeling the situation in Rwanda a genocide, the US strongly opposed the use of such strong rhetoric, a position which received significant support among other Security Council members.⁴ Not only does this speak to the historical reluctance to label a genocide as such, but also the influential power ascribed to the UN Security Council Permanent Five (P5) members in shaping broader international discourses concerning such labeling.

The UN Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide notes a finding of genocide requires member-states and competent organs of the UN to prevent and punish such acts.⁵ However, despite this obligation, and the fact that the Convention provides a detailed definition of what acts constitute genocide, the use of euphemisms in referring to situations involving the apparent commission of genocide remains widespread. When an atrocity is not recognized as a genocide, a dangerous precedent is set for future acts of semantic avoidance, and the ability of areas affected by genocide to recover is severely hampered.⁶ The UN Framework of Analysis for Atrocity Crimes asserts that past acts of genocide, serious human rights violations, and crimes against humanity are prominent indicators of a heightened risk of future genocides.⁷ This claim is supported by research demonstrating that a history of violence and aggression makes the engagement in future violent acts as a means of responding to conflict and hostility more likely.⁸ Given that governments which deny genocide are three times more likely to commit another genocide, international recognition is central to maintaining peace and security.⁹ It was not until Winston Churchill’s 1941 speech in which he stated “we are in the presence of a crime without a name,” that the absence of a label to describe the systematic mass murder of a group of people

¹ Ervin Staub, “The Roots and Prevention of Genocide and other Mass Violence,” *Zygon: Journal of Religion and Science* 47, no. 4 (2012), 822, accessed March 1, 2016, [doi: 10.1111/j.1467-9744.2012.01302.x](https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9744.2012.01302.x).

² Rony Blum et al., “‘Ethnic Cleansing’ Bleaches the Atrocities of Genocide,” *European Journal of Public Health* 18, no. 2 (2007), 204, accessed April 28, 2015, [doi: 10.1093/eurpub/ckm011](https://doi.org/10.1093/eurpub/ckm011).

³ Eric A. Heinze, “The Rhetoric of Genocide in U.S. Foreign Policy: Rwanda and Darfur Compared,” *Political Science Quarterly* 122, no. 3 (2007), 366, accessed June 12, 2016, [doi: 10.1002/j.1538-165X.2007.tb00602.x](https://doi.org/10.1002/j.1538-165X.2007.tb00602.x).

⁴ *Ibid.*, 364.

⁵ United Nations, *General Assembly Resolution 260, Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of Genocide*, December 9, 1948 (UN Doc. A/RES/260 (III)).

⁶ Barbara Harff, “No Lessons Learned from the Holocaust? Assessing Risks of Genocide and Political Mass Murder since 1955,” *American Political Science Review* 97, no.1 (2003), 61, accessed April 14, 2016, [doi: 10.1017/S0003055403000522](https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003055403000522).

⁷ United Nations, *Framework of Analysis for Atrocity Crimes: A Tool for Prevention*, October 30, 2014, http://www.un.org/en/preventgenocide/adviser/pdf/framework%20of%20analysis%20for%20atrocity%20crimes_en.pdf.

⁸ Harff, *No Lessons*, 61; Omar McDoom, “Predicting Violence Within Genocide: A Model of Elite Competition and Ethnic Segregation from Rwanda,” *Political Geography* 42, no. 1 (2014), 36, accessed May 30, 2015, [doi: 10.1016/j.polgeo.2014.05.006](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.polgeo.2014.05.006); Staub, *The Roots*, 838.

⁹ Gregory Stanton, “Cost of Denial,” (speech, April 23, 2008), accessed June 6, 2016, <http://www.genocidewatch.com/cost-of-denial>.

became apparent.¹⁰ Despite the pioneering efforts of Raphael Lemkin to fill this void by coining the term “genocide,” the term continues to be avoided to this day.

This article explores the ways in which language is used by P5 nations in the Security Council to avoid genocide recognition using the Srebrenica genocide as a case study. Srebrenica is an ideal case study to examine such rhetorical positioning for a number of reasons. First, the atrocities that occurred in Srebrenica constitute the largest genocide in Europe since the Holocaust and symbolize a failure of intelligence collection during peacekeeping operations, thereby undermining the credibility of western governments and the UN.¹¹ Second, Srebrenica occurred on the heels of the Rwandan genocide a year earlier, and thus the discussion at the UN, concerning Srebrenica, arose in an environment where the UN P5 and the international community more generally, were all coming to terms with the consequences of their inaction in Rwanda. Third, in recent years, there has been a turn towards formal recognition of Srebrenica as a genocide by the UN, providing an interesting opportunity to consider the historical context of the use of the term genocide by the P5 over time. As noted above, genocide recognition has important consequences in reducing the likelihood of future violence. In the case of Srebrenica, Prosecutor Serge Brammertz of the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia (ICTY) expressed concern regarding the repercussions of the continued denial of the Srebrenica genocide with respect to both individual harm to victims and families, and also the inhibition of reconciliation and the reinforcement of communal divisions within the former Yugoslavia.¹² Such concerns highlight the significance of genocide recognition and the ongoing timeliness of considering the Srebrenica case.

Through an analysis of diplomatic language utilized by UN P5 nations concerning how and whether to label Srebrenica a genocide, this article explores the intersections of language, power, and politics by examining how P5 nations choose to frame the genocide in Srebrenica in public UN Security Council debates. To do so, this article first considers the significance of an attention to language and its use by P5 members in particular, before introducing the specific case of Srebrenica while focusing on the history and context of the use—or avoidance—of the term “genocide.” After establishing this context, the article turns to an examination of the language used by P5 members in debates concerning Srebrenica. This language is analyzed through the lens of framing theory, an approach adopted from its common use in mass-media communications theory to serve as a method of analyzing how particular nations frame and represent narratives around the genocide label. This analysis proceeds in two parts. The first part involves an exploration of the explicit use of the term “genocide” by P5 nations. The second part then considers situations where P5 nations employ euphemisms to avoid using the term. Together, an analysis of these discourses demonstrates how UN Security Council P5 members use language as a mechanism to frame a conflict in a particular way that aligns with their own national political interests. Through this analysis, this article reaffirms the importance of explicit semantic genocide recognition, not only as an important legal determination, but one that also affects acknowledgment of the significance of a given atrocity event, and post-conflict growth and mediation processes.

Diplomatic Language and Genocide Recognition

Language is commonly used as a method for framing a particular interpretation of an act or event. Language used within international relations represents a culmination of dominant ideologies

¹⁰ Winston Churchill, “Prime Minister Winston Churchill’s Broadcast to the World about the Meeting with President Roosevelt,” (speech, London, August 24 1941) accessed October 18, 2018, <https://www.ibiblio.org/pha/timeline/410824awp.html>.

¹¹ Erna Rijdsdijk, “The Politics of Hard Knowledge: Uncertainty, Intelligence Failures and the ‘Last Minute Genocide’ of Srebrenica,” *Review of International Studies* 37, no. 5 (2011), 2222, accessed May 7, 2016, [doi: 10.1080/17512786.2013.841370](https://doi.org/10.1080/17512786.2013.841370); Mirza Velagic and Zlatka Velagic, “Do Court Rulings Matter? International Courts and Journalists’ Framing of the Srebrenica Genocide,” *Journalism Practice* 8, no. 4 (2014), 423, accessed July 2, 2016, [doi: 10.1080/17512786.2013.841370](https://doi.org/10.1080/17512786.2013.841370).

¹² International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia, “Prosecutor Serge Brammertz meets with Representative of Victims Associations,” (statement, The Hague, September 30, 2014), accessed June 12, 2016, <http://www.icty.org/en/press/prosecutor-serge-brammertz-meet-representatives-victims-associations>.

from social, political, and academic discourses.¹³ The construction of language does not always aim to perpetuate a single reality and can be used both as a form of communication and strategically to perpetuate certain “realities.”¹⁴ The language used within international political arenas is calculated and complex. This complexity is exacerbated when nations must navigate discussions concerning potential genocides, as within such contexts, language becomes moderated by national interests and transnational diplomacy.

In 1988, the term ethnic purge (“*etnicheskie chistki*”) was used by Soviet officials to describe the ethnic based forced removal of Azerbaijanis from Nagorno-Karabakh.¹⁵ Slobodan Milošević meanwhile, became the first politician to use the term “ethnic cleansing” to describe Kosovar Albanian commander’s violence towards Serbians.¹⁶ The term subsequently became part of the common vernacular of perpetrators and bystanders of the Srebrenica genocide and is now commonly referenced in UN documentation, as well as more generally in scholarly and diplomatic discussions of numerous atrocity situations. Such language remains despite the fact that “ethnic cleansing” implicitly suggests that massacres may serve as a means of improving hygiene through the “cleansing” of a region, and lacks any formal definition, legal or otherwise. The term has been adopted by many politicians and journalists and has penetrated the official language of international law and diplomacy.¹⁷ In Rwanda, avoidance of the term genocide as mass killings took place, acted as a diplomatic excuse for non-intervention, contributing to the deaths of over 800,000 people. While “ethnic cleansing” is commonly used by the UN and human rights groups in ways that are undoubtedly well-intentioned, the use of this term has been found to be associated with denial and delay in bystander intervention.¹⁸ The use of “ethnic cleansing” and other similar terms, especially when such use is part of a concerted effort to avoid the language of genocide, indicates an unwillingness to take forceful action to prevent imminent atrocities or halt them once they commence. Based on their analysis of the use of the terms “ethnic cleansing” and genocide in legal literature, UN press statements, and statements made by Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International, Blum, Stanton, Sagi and Richter argue that “the ratio between the terms ‘genocide and ‘ethnic cleansing’ measures the will for emergency response.”¹⁹ It is not until atrocities have been explicitly labeled as genocide that force has been used to stop them.²⁰ For example, it was not until the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) won the civil war and ended the genocide that the US State Department finally acknowledged genocide had occurred. Although the US government referred to “acts of genocide” occurring in Rwanda in May, 1994, this specific phrasing was a pragmatic determination used as part of a concerted effort to avoid any legal obligation to intervene and occurred six weeks after the mass killings began, when denying that a genocide was unfolding in Rwanda became an untenable position.²¹ While it has been argued that the genocide label has lost its normative power in terms of its assumed obligations to prevent and punish acts of genocide, this article argues its power extends beyond the perceived obligation for intervention.²²

While many lamented the absence of civil society mobilization and the avoidance of genocide recognition in Rwanda, tens of thousands rallied in support of intervention in Darfur,

¹³ Karin Marie Fierke, “Links Across the Abyss: Language and Logic in International Relations,” *International Studies Quarterly* 46, no. 1 (2002), 351, accessed May 14, 2016, <http://www.jstor.org.ezp01.library.qut.edu.au/stable/3096092>.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 349.

¹⁵ Blum et al., *Ethnic Cleansing*, 204

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 205.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 204.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 207.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 205.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 207.

²¹ Samantha Power, *A Problem from Hell: America and the age of Genocide* (New York: Basic Books, 2003), 361.

²² Luke Glanville, “Is ‘Genocide’ Still a Powerful Word?” *Journal of Genocide Research* 11, no. 4 (2009), 468, accessed November 19, 2018, [doi: 10.1080/14623520903309529](https://doi.org/10.1080/14623520903309529).

in part because of the widespread identification of the conflict as genocide.²³ While the debate of whether or not Darfur was a genocide may have detracted from meaningful action, it is unlikely Darfur would have gained such widespread support without the power of the genocide frame.²⁴ It is also noteworthy that the Bush administration labeled Darfur a genocide through a morally unambiguous framing of “saving” Darfur by western powers, with the UN subsequently noting there was insufficient evidence for a determination of genocide.²⁵ While no actual hierarchy of international crimes exists in any legal sense, it remains important to recognize the ability of the genocide label to mobilize international advocacy efforts as well as its role in altering the trajectory from violence as a means of conflict resolution to one of international recognition and mediation.

Genocide recognition also extends beyond a legal call for intervention, given its ability to provide victims with acknowledgment of the crimes that have been committed against them. This acknowledgment is increasingly important as we are now aware of the significant impacts of genocide denial in the form of transgenerational cultural trauma for descendants of genocide survivors.²⁶ The narrative of genocide denial has been connected to feelings of resentment and of one’s personhood being attacked, amongst descendants of genocide victims, both of which have significant psychological implications.²⁷ The recognition of crimes perpetrated against a group of people has far-reaching impacts in easing the trauma of victims and, more importantly, in reducing the likelihood of revenge.²⁸ Acknowledging the culpability for crimes committed also provides a base for reducing “othering” on the basis of cultural, national, religious or ethnic grounds.²⁹

The Security Council is the peak body in the UN for binding decisions and has the power to authorize intervention in situations of mass atrocities. As such, the UN Security Council, and the language used by the P5 members in particular, is of significance when exploring the use of language and assessing national interests in responses to genocide. Claude notes that in instances of Security Council engagement with mass atrocities, a myriad of factors influence language use.³⁰ The use of particular phrases and language is commonly challenged by P5 nations in the pursuit of political goals. For example, some argue that the motivation for the US labeling the atrocities in Darfur a genocide in 2004 was to create a “philanthropic alibi” for US projection of power, as well as, to improve the human rights image of the Bush administration prior to an upcoming election.³¹ Do Monte furthers this notion by asserting that control over language within the Security Council is a means of projecting power.³²

Language in this domain reinforces power hierarchies by giving a stronger voice to privilege, such as P5 nations. Gifkins postulates that there are three key reasons as to why language used within the Security Council is of significance in decision-making processes.³³ Firstly, language is not static and is representative of member-states’ political attitudes at a particular time.³⁴ Essentially,

²⁶ Selina L. Mangassarian, “100 Years of Trauma: The Armenian Genocide and Intergenerational Cultural Trauma,” *Journal of Aggression, Maltreatment & Trauma* 25, no. 4 (2016), 9, accessed September 10, 2017, [doi: 10.1080/10926771.2015.1121191](https://doi.org/10.1080/10926771.2015.1121191).

²⁷ Anie Kalayjian and Marian Weisberg, “Generational Impacts of Mass Trauma: The Post-Ottoman Turkish Genocide of the Armenians,” in *Jihad and Sacred Vengeance*, ed. Jerry S. Piven, Chris Boyd, and Henry W. Lawton, (New York: Writers Club Press, 2002), 264.

²⁸ Belinda Cooper and Taner Akçam, “Turks, Armenians, and the “G-Word,”” *World Policy Journal* 22, no. 3 (2005), 88, accessed October 16, 2018, <https://search-proquest-com.ezp01.library.qut.edu.au/docview/232587799?OpenUrlRefId=info:xri/sid:primo&accountid=13380>.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 88.

³⁰ Inis Claude, “Collective Legitimization as a Political Function of the United Nations,” *International Organisation* 20, no. 3 (1996), 368, accessed May 14, 2016, [doi: 10.1017/S0020818300012832](https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020818300012832).

³¹ Samuel Totten, “The US Investigation into the Darfur Crisis and the US Government’s Determination of Genocide,” *Genocide Studies and Prevention: An international Journal* 1, no. 9 (2006), 12, accessed February 21, 2016, <http://scholarcommons.usf.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1256&context=gsp>.

³² Izadora Xavier Do Monte, “The Pen is Mightier than the H-Bomb,” *International Journal of Postcolonial Studies* 18, no. 5 (2016), 671, accessed August 3, 2016, [doi: 10.1080/1369801X.2015.1131180](https://doi.org/10.1080/1369801X.2015.1131180).

³³ Jess Gifkins, “R2P in the UN Security Council: Darfur, Libya and Beyond,” *Cooperation and Conflict* 51, no. 2 (2016), 150, accessed March 14, 2016, [doi: 10.1177/0010836715613365](https://doi.org/10.1177/0010836715613365).

³⁴ Helen Fein, Walter Ezell, and Herbert F. Spirer, “Recognition of Genocide in Bosnia: Frameworks of Interpretation in US Newspapers,” *Studies in Communication* 6, no. 1 (2011), 79, accessed April 14, 2016, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/S0275->

language use is a representative “snapshot,” illustrating the dominant discourse of a particular period.³⁵ Secondly, drafting resolutions and engaging in debate is “both political and routine” as promoting an innovative linguistic frame may be profoundly political, however, through the process of repetition, its use becomes normalized.³⁶ Dunne and Gifkins assert that this dynamic stems from the value placed upon “previously agreed language” as an indicator of consensus among Council members.³⁷ Finally, the repetition of particular phrases within the Security Council is not “simple automation devoid of meaning,” but rather, a process of cognitive reaffirmation and perpetuation of shared meaning.³⁸ Essentially, member-states may affirm their position on an atrocity event by continuously associating such events with terms such as “ethnic cleansing,” and subsequently presenting that particular linguistic frame as previously agreed language. Werner notes that by recalling language used previously as well as utilizing existing normative frameworks, decisions made in the Security Council are seen as being a part of a wider history of international regulation as opposed to random choices.³⁹ The use of language within a discourse of transnational diplomacy is a calculated amalgamation of a number of variables including; power, national interest, previously agreed language, and linguistic repetition. The extent to which these variables moderate the recognition of an act of genocide within the UN Security Council requires further consideration. This is significant given the importance of such recognition for post-conflict mediation, the reparation of communal divisions, and the psychological wellbeing of victims and survivors.

Srebrenica

The Srebrenica genocide occurred only one year after the world said “never again” following Rwanda. As the largest genocide on European soil since the Holocaust, discussions of the Srebrenica genocide have been marked by divisive politics and acts of genocide denial, creating the potential for transgenerational trauma among victims and their families. The genocide in Srebrenica occurred during the Bosnian war (1992-1995), involving the declaration of independence of the countries making up the former Yugoslavia. Srebrenica, a town in eastern Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH), lies only 15 kilometers from the Serbian border and as such, was of strategic significance to Serbian forces.⁴⁰ In 1993, the Security Council passed a resolution declaring, “all parties and others treat Srebrenica and its surroundings as a ‘safe area’ that should be free from armed attack or any other hostile act.”⁴¹ However, on July 11, 1995 the Bosnian Serb army, under the command of Ratko Mladić, entered Srebrenica, largely uncontested by Dutch peacekeepers. Shortly thereafter, approximately 8000 Bosnian Muslim men and boys were systematically murdered, predominantly through mass executions.⁴²

Although the atrocities in Srebrenica occurred with limited international resistance, the past two decades have seen political and judicial recognition that the actions of the Bosnian Serb forces constituted genocide.⁴³ Though some contention does exist within academic literature regarding labeling Srebrenica a genocide, largely with reference to the ability to prove intent, rulings by the

[7982\(2011\)0000006007.](https://doi.org/10.1080/10357718.2011.613148)

³⁵ Gifkins, *R2P in the UNSC*, 150.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ Tim Dunne and Jess Gifkins, “Libya and the State of Intervention,” *Australian Journal of International Affairs* 65, no. 5 (2011), 523, accessed May 16, 2016, [doi: 10.1080/10357718.2011.613148](https://doi.org/10.1080/10357718.2011.613148).

³⁸ Gifkins, *R2P in the UNSC*, 151.

³⁹ Wouter Werner, “Recall it again, Sam. Practices of Repetition in the Security Council,” *Nordic Journal of International Law* 86, no. 2 (2017), 155, accessed January 22, 2018, [doi: 10.1163/15718107-08602001](https://doi.org/10.1163/15718107-08602001).

⁴⁰ Katherine Southwick, “Srebrenica as Genocide? The Krstic Decision and the Language of the Unspeakable,” *Yale Human Rights and Development Journal* 8, no. 1 (2005), 192, accessed May 11, 2016, <http://link.galegroup.com.ezp01.library.qut.edu.au/apps/doc/A134381809/LT?u=qut&sid=LT&xid=be7ecf2e>.

⁴¹ United Nations, *3199th Meeting of the Security Council*, New York, April 16, 1993 (UN Doc. S/RES/819).

⁴² Helge Brunborg, Torkild Hovde Lyngstad and Henrick Urdal, “Accounting for Genocide: How Many were Killed in Srebrenica?” *European Journal of Population* 19, no. 1 (2003), 230, accessed May 12, 2016, [doi: 10.1023/A:1024949307841](https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1024949307841).

⁴³ Larissa Van Den Herik, “Accountability Through Fact Finding: Appraising Inquiry in the Context of Srebrenica,” *Netherlands International Law Review* 62, no. 2 (2015), 300, accessed April 5, 2016, [doi: 10.1007/s40802-015-0035-9](https://doi.org/10.1007/s40802-015-0035-9).

ICTY and the International Court of Justice (ICJ) both concluded that the atrocities in Srebrenica legally constituted genocide.⁴⁴

Despite the determination of genocide in Srebrenica by the ICTY and the ICJ, this finding did not penetrate the official language of international law or diplomatic discourses within the UN for some time. Although Srebrenica is currently referred to as a genocide within UN public documentation, this has not always been the case. For example, in a 2005 commemorative speech, former Secretary-General Kofi Annan referred to the Srebrenica genocide as a “massacre.”⁴⁵ Even when referring to the ICTY indictments of Ratko Mladić and Radovan Karadžić, which included genocide charges, Annan did not refer to genocide.⁴⁶ This omission may be contrasted with a commemorative speech delivered in 2015 by former Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, who openly referred to Srebrenica as a genocide.⁴⁷ On July 8, 2015, a draft resolution was introduced which would formally acknowledge within the Security Council that the atrocities which had occurred in Srebrenica constituted genocide. France, the United Kingdom (UK), and the US voted in favor of the resolution; China abstained from voting, and Russia voted against the resolution.⁴⁸ Within debates on the draft resolution, Russia declared that the resolution, which was submitted by the UK, was politically motivated and would only lead to greater tension within BiH. However, the veto of the resolution by Russia can be seen as a manifestation of the impact of domestic politics on international policy, as it has been argued that Russia vetoed the resolution due to their political ties with Serbia.⁴⁹

In contrast to the UN’s apprehension to label Srebrenica a genocide, advocacy groups used the language of genocide in reference to the Srebrenica massacres only weeks after the atrocities were committed.⁵⁰ For example, Holly Burkhalter, advocacy director of Human Rights Watch at the time, published a piece in the *Washington Post* on July 20, 1995, only nine days after the atrocities of Srebrenica. In the article, titled “what we can do to stop genocide,” Burkhalter argued that the clear effort by the Serbian Military to eliminate the Bosnian Muslim population “in whole or in part” in Srebrenica and surrounding areas, constituted a “textbook case of genocide.”⁵¹ The emergence of the genocide label within this discourse, so soon after Srebrenica, demonstrates that it was in the lexicon of advocacy works and journalists, and as such, was available for diplomats to use. While civil society groups commonly use language as a tool for framing a conflict, particularly to mobilize wider public attention for a given cause, the genocide label is not just avoided to circumvent the mandated obligation for intervention. The use of the genocide label to describe the Holocaust and the Khmer Rouge period in Cambodia created reference points for an implicit moral weight that may be absent when referring to crimes against humanity.⁵² The difficulty in proving specific intent

⁴⁴ *Prosecutor v. Radislav Krstic*, International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia, August 2, 2001; *Bosnia and Herzegovina v. Serbia and Montenegro*, International Court of Justice, February 26, 2007; Edward Herman and David Peterson, *The Politics of Genocide* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2010), 47.

⁴⁵ Security Council Report, *Srebrenica Anniversary*, July 1, 2015, http://www.securitycouncilreport.org/monthly-forecast/2015-07/bosnia_and_herzegovina_5.php; Kofi Annan, “May we all Learn and Act on the Lessons of Srebrenica,” (speech, New York, July 11, 2005), accessed August 5, 2016, <http://www.un.org/press/en/2005/sgsm9993.doc.htm>.

⁴⁶ Annan, *May we all Learn*, 1.

⁴⁷ Ban Ki-moon, “Srebrenica: Remembering and Honouring the Victims of the Genocide,” (speech, New York, July 1, 2015), accessed August 12, 2016, <https://www.un.org/sg/en/content/sg/statement/2015-07-01/secretary-generals-remarks-high-level-commemorative-event-srebrenica>.

⁴⁸ United Nations, *7481st Meeting of the Security Council*, New York, July 8, 2015 (UN Doc. S/PV.7481).

⁴⁹ Reid Standish, “Why did Russia Veto Recognising Srebrenica as Genocide,” *Foreign Policy*, July 9, 2015, accessed August 12, 2016, <http://foreignpolicy.com/2015/07/09/why-did-russia-veto-recognizing-srebrenica-as-a-genocide-putin-bosnia/>; Bridget Kendall, “Russia Vetoes UN Move to call Srebrenica ‘Genocide,’” *British Broadcasting Corporation*, July 7, 2015, accessed August 12, 2016, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-33445772>.

⁵⁰ Power, *A Problem from Hell*, 402.

⁵¹ Holly Burkhalter, “What Can we do to Stop this Genocide,” *Washington Post*, July 20, 1995, accessed August 14, 2016, https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/opinions/1995/07/20/what-we-can-do-to-stop-this-genocide/49e17fad-cee2-4b47-b316-6db07df51efc/?utm_term=.3b6238494b97.

⁵² Dawn L. Rothe and Christopher W. Mullins, “Darfur and the Politicization of International Law: Genocide or Crimes Against Humanity?” *Humanity & Society* 31, no.1 (2007), 84, accessed May 12, 2016, <http://has.sagepub.com.ezp01.library.qut.edu.au/content/31/1/83.full.pdf+html>.

is also commonly used as an argument to avoid the genocide label. For example, some refute the application of the genocide label to the Srebrenica massacres, as the killing of military age boys and men was seen as a tactic of war, as opposed to an act specifically intended to destroy the area's Bosnian Muslim population in whole or in part.⁵³ Serbia still refuses to label Srebrenica a genocide with various political parties in Serbia both disputing both the events surrounding Srebrenica as well as questioning the evidence of the genocide itself.⁵⁴ This trend continues with Milorad Dodik, the former president of Republika Srpska, strongly opposing children in Republika Srpska schools being taught about the Srebrenica genocide, or the siege of Sarajevo.⁵⁵ When one considers these broader discourses surrounding Srebrenica, both within and outside of the Security Council, the highly divisive and politicized nature of the use of the genocide label becomes apparent.

Methodology

In examining the language used by the P5 around Srebrenica, this article adopts an exploratory, post-positivist methodological approach, allowing for a focus on the meaning behind a construct, rather than observable fact. It adopts the use of framing from the mass-media communications theory, known as framing theory, to consider how particular nations frame and represent narratives surrounding the label of genocide. The term framing is derived from Goffman's "schemata of interpretation" that allows individuals to "locate, perceive, identify and label" occurrences within their space and the world at large.⁵⁶ Entman extends this definition by noting that framing is to "select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation."⁵⁷ Framing within mass media is usually moderated by variables such as professional norms or organizational/ideological values which are subsequently reflected in a journalist's coverage of events.⁵⁸ Similarly, the use of framing within international relations and foreign policy refers to the use of political rhetoric and manipulation in an attempt to influence attitudes and behaviors or influence decision-making.⁵⁹ While scholars have explored how the media framed the genocide in Srebrenica, the political response of nation-states to this genocide has not been considered in terms of framing theory.⁶⁰ Framing theory posits that the manner in which something is presented to an audience influences how that information is interpreted and processed.⁶¹ Framing is a central component of politics and policy-making processes given its ability to shape public opinion.⁶² Political elites commonly engage in framing processes, with one of the most notable examples being the declaration of war by US President George W. Bush following the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001. While other avenues for framing were available and other enemies may have been identified, the "war on terror" frame and the necessity of military intervention in Afghanistan was considered vital in perpetuating an emotionally compelling and

⁵³ Herman and Peterson, *The Politics of Genocide*, 47.

⁵⁴ Jelena Obradovic-Wochnik, "Knowledge, Acknowledgment and Denial in Serbia's Responses to the Srebrenica Massacre," *Journal of Contemporary European Studies* 17, no. 1 (2009), 61, accessed March 30, 2016, [doi: 10.1080/14782800902844719](https://doi.org/10.1080/14782800902844719).

⁵⁵ Danijel Kovacevic, "Bosnian Serbs to Ban Lessons on Srebrenica Genocide," *Balkan Transnational Justice*, June 6, 2017, accessed March 4, 2018, <http://www.balkaninsight.com/en/article/bosnian-serbs-to-ban-lectures-on-srebrenica-sarajevo-siege-06-06-2017>.

⁵⁶ Erving Goffman, *Frame Analysis* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1974), 21.

⁵⁷ Robert M. Entman, "Framing: Toward Clarification of a Fractured Paradigm," *Journal of Communication* 43, no. 4, 52, accessed July 4, 2016, [doi: 10.1111/j.1460-2466.1993.tb01304.x](https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1460-2466.1993.tb01304.x).

⁵⁸ Dietram A. Scheufele, "Framing as a Theory of Media Effects," *Journal of Communication* 49, no. 1 (1999), 115, accessed July 2, 2016, [doi: 10.1093/joc/49.1.103](https://doi.org/10.1093/joc/49.1.103).

⁵⁹ Alex Mintz and Steven B. Redd, "Framing Effects in International Relations," *Synthese* 135, no. 2 (2003), 193, accessed July 2, 2016, [doi: 10.1023/a:1023460923628](https://doi.org/10.1023/a:1023460923628).

⁶⁰ Velagic and Velagic, *Do Court Rulings Matter*, 422.

⁶¹ Scheufele, *Framing as a Theory*, 116.

⁶² Melissa K. Merry, "Constructing Policy Narratives in 140 characters or less: The Case of Gun Policy Organizations," *Policy Studies Journal* 44, no. 4 (2016), 373, accessed June 12, 2017, [doi: 10.1111/psj.12142](https://doi.org/10.1111/psj.12142).

unambiguous frame to the public.⁶³ By analyzing the political framing of genocide, the use of rhetorical devices can be examined by highlighting common euphemisms used in lieu of genocide, and making connections between these and the political discourses behind such euphemisms.

The data used for this project was collected from UNBISNET, a publicly available database providing bibliographic records, voting records, and meeting records for different organs of the UN. A key word search was conducted with relevant debates found under the topics "BiH," "former Yugoslavia situation," and "ICTY." The search was subsequently narrowed by action body, in this case, the only relevant organ being the Security Council. The dates were also narrowed temporally, to only encompass debates between 1995 and 2015. This search process yielded a total of 32 documents in which Srebrenica was referenced by P5 nations. The data for this article was drawn from these 32 documents, all of which were weighted equally.

As language used within Security Council debates is an area with limited research, the process of inductive coding was instrumental in identifying unanticipated themes which may not have been identified through deductive methods. Genocide-related rhetoric was identified through numerous readings of relevant documents and document search tool functions. Common euphemisms used to avoid labeling an atrocity as a genocide were identified through both analysis of relevant literature, and the language employed by P5 members when other nations referred to the crimes committed at Srebrenica as genocide, in what became clear as semantic avoidance.⁶⁴ When a particular theme emerged, the data was coded for discourse as well as for the P5 nations which engaged with this particular rhetoric. The absence of particular discourses, silences, and other salient themes within the data were also noted, as what remains unstated, is often as significant as what is stated.⁶⁵ The use of discourse analysis allowed for an in-depth analysis of power, politics and language. To analyze the results of this project, the key themes identified through the open and axial coding processes were reviewed and attention was paid to textual variation and silences within a particular theme. An analysis of variation has the ability to highlight discrepancies regarding the way particular nations framed the Srebrenica genocide through language use. This process also enabled the evolution of the particular linguistic frame(s) adopted by a particular nation to be tracked over time, and for comparisons to be made among the P5 nations.

Security Council P5 members were selected as the exclusive focus of this study in order to narrow the scope of analysis, while focusing on especially powerful actors; however, there would be merit in similar analyses being conducted on additional document sets, such as ICTY legal decisions related to Srebrenica, or discussions of P5 debates related to genocide, and Srebrenica in the press. Studies of these document sets would provide interesting complementary analyses to that conducted here.

Use of Genocide Label

The following section outlines how the Srebrenica massacres were framed by the P5 members through explicit references to genocide in Security Council debates. The use of the genocide label refers to instances in which Srebrenica is explicitly referred to as a genocide without any form of deflection or qualification. While such explicit use of the genocide label in reference to Srebrenica was rare in the debates analyzed, this section will discuss in what context the Srebrenica genocide was recognized as such, and how such recognition was moderated by variables such as domestic politics, the framing of national image, and coalition preferences in international diplomacy.

Within Security Council debates, the P5 nations that frame Srebrenica as a genocide incite much stronger linguistic and political rhetoric than the deflective use of euphemisms. Luban notes that when the public sees an atrocity framed as murder, motivation to intervene is lost.⁶⁶

⁶³ Robert Entman, "Cascading Activation: Contesting the White House's Frame after 9/11," *Political Communication* 20, no. 4 (2003), 415, accessed June 14, 2017, doi: [10.1080/10584600390244176](https://doi.org/10.1080/10584600390244176).

⁶⁴ Blum et al., *Ethnic Cleansing Bleaches Atrocities*, 204.

⁶⁵ Blake Poland and Ann Peaderon, "Reading Between the Lines: Interpreting Silences in Qualitative Research," *Qualitative Inquiry* 4, no. 2 (1998), 294, accessed May 11, 2016, doi: [10.1177/107780049800400209](https://doi.org/10.1177/107780049800400209).

⁶⁶ David Luban, "Calling Genocide by its Rightful Name: Lemkin's word, Darfur and the UN Report," *Georgetown University Law Centre* 7, no. 1 (2006), 311, accessed September 9, 2016, <http://scholarship.law.georgetown.edu/>

The use of the word genocide implores international action whereas “mere” murder promotes the discourse as the situation being “their” (i.e. a wholly local) problem.⁶⁷ Linguistically, genocide has implications that the use of euphemisms such as mass killing does not.

Srebrenica was framed as a genocide by non-P5 nations such as Morocco and Turkey as early as November 1995.⁶⁸ This particular frame coincides with the first indictment by the ICTY against Dragan Nikolić, a detention camp commander, as well as the indictment of Radovan Karadžić and Ratko Mladić on genocide charges in July.⁶⁹ Even with this precedent set by these nations and the ICTY, the genocide frame was not adopted by a P5 nation until November 2010. It was the US who first explicitly labeled Srebrenica a genocide in a statement to “condemn denials of the Srebrenica genocide, which are simply indefensible, [and] undermine respect for the rule of law, impede reconciliation, and hinder inter-ethnic cooperation.”⁷⁰ What is notable about this initial reference and subsequent references by the US, is that their aim appears to have been focused primarily on condemning other nations, rather than making a clear statement recognizing Srebrenica as a site of genocide. Among explicit genocide references made by the US, other notable linguistic features include their descriptive and formal language, and consistent use of collective pronouns, exemplified by the previously quoted statement. Despite the US referring to Srebrenica as a genocide in 2010, this initial recognition did not signify a complete shift in US framing of the Srebrenica genocide, as both the genocide label and various euphemisms continued to be used interchangeably by the US from 2014 onwards. Upon further analysis of the data, it is evident that US representatives to the UN who referred to Srebrenica as a genocide were different individuals than those who engaged in the use of genocidal euphemisms. Explicit US references to Srebrenica as a genocide occurred in 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013, and 2015, and were made by Rosemary DiCarlo, Jeffrey DeLaurentis, and Samantha Power. However, statements by US representative David Pressman used euphemisms when referring to the Srebrenica genocide in 2014 and 2015. All of these individuals were US representatives to the UN under the Obama administration and as such, the shifting US rhetoric from 2012 to 2015 cannot be attributed to changes in the US administration.

It is not until 2015 that another P5 nation explicitly framed the Srebrenica massacres as a genocide. On May 12, 2015, the UK observed “[t]he seventieth anniversary of the end of the Second World War and the twentieth anniversary of the Srebrenica genocide this year illustrate that in every generation Bosnians, Bosniaks, Bosnian Croats and Bosnia Serbs have suffered from conflict.”⁷¹ As is seen in this statement, the manner in which the UK frames Srebrenica is similar to that of the US, combining a relatively factual depiction of the massacres with the use of collective pronouns. The US and the UK however, frame Srebrenica using far more emotive rhetoric in July 2015, when a debate was held concerning as to whether the Security Council would officially label Srebrenica a genocide. As can be seen in the following extract from the US, the language shifts, becoming more expressive with respect to sentiment and descriptions of the atrocities.

Imagine being the mother of those five sons, killed in the Srebrenica genocide, and being told that a denial of the genocide would advance reconciliation. It is madness — a madness motivated by a similar negation of the Bosnian Muslim experience that helped fuel the slaughter at Srebrenica in the first place. As long as the truth is denied — whether in the Council or in the region — there can be no meaningful reconciliation. Imagine if this were us — if those were our families. Would we reconcile when our experience was being denied? There is no stability in genocide denial. The Council did everything in its power to get Russia on board with this simple draft resolution, which does not even name the perpetrators, but

[facpub/893/](#).

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 311.

⁶⁸ United Nations, *3595th Meeting of the Security Council*, New York, November 22, 1995 (UN Doc. S/PV.3593); United Nations, *3607th Meeting of the Security Council*, New York, December 15, 1995, (UN Doc. S/PV.3607).

⁶⁹ International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia, “ICTY Timeline,” 2016, accessed September 2, 2016, <http://www.icty.org/en/in-focus/timeline>.

⁷⁰ United Nations, *6421st Meeting of the Security Council*, New York, November 11, 2010 (UN Doc. S/PV.6421).

⁷¹ United Nations, *7440th Meeting of the Security Council*, New York, May 12, 2015 (UN Doc. S/PV.7481).

Russia had a red line. The draft resolution could not reference the genocide in Srebrenica; it could not reference a fact.⁷²

The same features are also seen in the way the UK frames Srebrenica in this particular debate. The language used evokes an emotional response and represents a noticeable shift in rhetoric.

Some said that in submitting this draft resolution, we risked ethnic division in the Balkans. The emotional responses in the region in the past weeks show that until past actions are acknowledged and accepted, we cannot move forward. As Adisada Dudic said so poignantly at the commemorative event last week, “Denial does not make the facts go away. It does not change the past. And it certainly does not erase memory.” It is denial, and not this draft resolution, that will cause division. Denial is the final insult to the victims. It undermines the prospects for a secure, peaceful future for Bosnia and Herzegovina — a future that all of its citizens deserve. Because, even two decades on, the horrors some choose to deny are still ongoing for families in Bosnia. The remains of hundreds of the victims of the genocide — fathers, sons, mothers and daughters — have yet to be found. The suffering of their loved ones, and their search for truth, continues to this day. Russia’s actions will only exacerbate their grief.⁷³

There is also a notable shift from collective to individual language by the US, with the representative, in this case Samantha Power, referring to her own experiences as a journalist in the former Yugoslavia as well her personal disappointment regarding Russia’s veto of the draft resolution.⁷⁴

France did not join the US and the UK in framing Srebrenica as a genocide until the draft resolution strongly condemning Srebrenica and labeling it a genocide, was presented to the Council in July 2015. On July 8, 2015, France stated that “[u]nfortunately, the Security Council today could not adopt a draft resolution to commemorate the twentieth anniversary of the Srebrenica genocide and to pay tribute to all the innocent victims on all sides of the conflict in Bosnia and Herzegovina.”⁷⁵ Although France explicitly frames the Srebrenica massacres as genocide, the language employed by France does not incite as strong of an emotive response as that of the UK and the US. Instead, France’s statement is more reminiscent of the language used by the other P5 nations prior to the labeling debate, with respect to its more formal language, factual emphasis, and less confrontational tone. In the wake of the veto of the draft resolution by Russia, both France and the UK have continued to refer to Srebrenica as a genocide.

All told, when deflections and euphemisms are accounted for, explicit references to the Srebrenica massacres as a genocide in the documents analyzed are quite limited. Although the US makes the most genocide references out of any P5 nation, it is not the dominant frame the US employs. Meanwhile, no references to genocide are made by Russia or China from 1995 to 2015; instead, both nations rely exclusively on the use of euphemisms when referring to the Srebrenica genocide.

A number of different rationales can explain the manner in which the US, UK, and France engaged with framing Srebrenica as a genocide. The impetus for the P5 nations to label Srebrenica a genocide from 2010 onwards was brought about by a variety of factors pertaining to the power of the P5, the effect of domestic politics on international policy, and political cost-benefit analyses. Do Monte asserts that in resolutions proposed within the Security Council, permanent members can linguistically emphasize certain issues in order to construct a “progressive and liberal” image.⁷⁶ Do Monte’s argument appears applicable with respect to debates held in the Security Council concerning the Srebrenica genocide. The US has a history of using the UN as a platform to project its

⁷² United Nations, *7481st Meeting of the Security Council*, New York, July 8, 2015 (UN Doc. S/PV.7481).

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Do Monte, *The Pen is Mightier*, 679.

power through “philanthropic” pursuits with respect to genocide. For example, certain observers argue that the US labeling of Darfur as a genocide was politically motivated by a desire to enhance the country’s human rights record in the wake of abuses at Guantanamo Bay and Abu Ghraib US detention sites being uncovered.⁷⁷ Similar to how Olmastroni notes the Bush government employed a particular frame in order to legitimize intervention into Iraq, the US is using the genocide frame to promote their own national interests when referring to the Srebrenica massacres as a genocide.⁷⁸ By doing so, the US were arguably able to enhance their liberal credentials through the power of language within the Security Council.

Timing and domestic politics are another factor that likely influenced the framing of the Srebrenica massacres by the US. The initial reference to the massacres as a genocide by the US occurred in 2010, shortly after the 2009 inauguration of US President Barack Obama. President Obama’s philosophic pragmatism and his willingness to deploy American military power on humanitarian grounds informed his foreign policy decision making.⁷⁹ During the previous Republican administration, issues relating to foreign policy were both publicly and politically less salient, with UN related goals ranking very lowly in the pursuit of multilateralism.⁸⁰ Despite increased public interest in cooperative internationalism in the early 2000s, this sentiment was not echoed by most US Republican politicians and as such became a platform for the Democratic Party to use to its advantage in the election.⁸¹ As the US shifted to a Democratic administration more concerned with cooperative internationalism, and amidst an environment where political backlash, especially domestically, for non-intervention in Srebrenica would have been limited, labeling Srebrenica a genocide was likely viewed as politically advantageous by the US government.

It is likely that similar to the shift which led to the US labeling Srebrenica a genocide, comparable factors affected the UK’s decision to do the same. Historically, atrocities tend to be framed as genocide when there would be limited or no costs to a particular nation. For example, the Rwandan genocide was only framed as such by the P5 after mass troop commitments were no longer necessary to halt the killings.⁸² Along these lines, labeling the Srebrenica massacres a genocide twenty years after they occurred enables nations to promote a liberal discourse whilst incurring limited political reprisal for inaction.⁸³ Do Monte furthers this argument by noting that the P5 members commonly place emphasis on issues that are unproblematic to them at a domestic level through the power ascribed to language within the Security Council.⁸⁴

The shift towards more emotive language in Council discussions concerning the Srebrenica massacres, and the framing of such massacres as genocide by France also merits further consideration. Jackson argues that the use of language which appeals to emotion is a tool for the construction of a particular reality, having consequences for both social and political structures.⁸⁵ If one accepts this proposition, emotive language may be seen as a form of persuasion which adds a layer of moral weight to a discussion. Within the Security Council, a wide vocabulary is employed to express member-state’s sentiments regarding a particular issue. Although the works of both Gifkins and Gruenberg feature language analyses of pre-ambulatory clauses and resolutions, such research can be extrapolated and applied to language within Security Council debates.⁸⁶ Gruenberg identifies

⁷⁷ Totten, *The US Investigation*, 17.

⁷⁸ Francesco Olmastroni, *Framing War* (New York: Routledge, 2014), 20.

⁷⁹ Peter Gries, *The Politics of American Foreign Policy*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2014), 29.

⁸⁰ Joshua Busby and Jonathan Monten, “Republican Elites and Foreign Policy Attitudes,” *Political Science Quarterly* 127, no. 1 (2012), 120, accessed August 24, 2016, <http://search.proquest.com.ezp01.library.qut.edu.au/docview/1018688760?pq-origsite=summon>.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 121.

⁸² Heinze, *The Rhetoric of Genocide*, 361.

⁸³ Power, *A Problem from Hell*, 395.

⁸⁴ Do Monte, *The Pen is Mightier*, 680.

⁸⁵ Richard Jackson, *Writing the War on Terrorism: Language, Politics and Counter-terrorism* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005), 23.

⁸⁶ Gifkins, *R2P in the UNSC*, 148; Justin Gruenberg, “An Analysis of the United Nations Security Council Resolutions: Are all Countries Treated Equally,” *Case Western Reserve Journal of International Law* 41, no.1 (2009), 483, accessed August

a list of words used within UNSC resolutions that have negative emotional connotations, ranking them according to their emotional effects, arguing that words such as “concerned” and “grieved,” are emotionally weak, while words such as “indignant” and “censured” are much stronger in terms of their emotional impact.⁸⁷ The words employed by the US and the UK, particularly terms such as “condemn” and “deplore,” rank approximately half-way on Gruenberg’s proposed list of negative emotive rhetoric. Again, the use of such emotive rhetoric situates the Western P5 nations as progressive by “condemning” and “deploring” the actions of others.⁸⁸ Once again, the manner in which the Srebrenica genocide is framed by the P5 nations through linguistic features is heavily influenced by the power associated with such language.

The fact that France only adopts the genocide label within the very debate concerning whether the Council will collectively officially label Srebrenica a genocide, was likely influenced by the strong historical preference for the US, UK, and France to act as a coalition representing an alternative frame to that put forth by Russia and China.⁸⁹ Do Monte also notes that words used within the Security Council can create and alter relations between nations and as such, in order to maintain socio-political relationships in a diplomatic space, common linguistic discourses may need to be perpetuated at certain junctures.⁹⁰ The formation of the US-UK-French coalition to collectively frame Srebrenica as a genocide also further demonstrates the importance of language in maintaining international political relationships within the Security Council.

Use of Euphemisms

In contrast to the rarity of explicit references to genocide in discussions of the Srebrenica massacres in the documents analyzed, it was quite common for the P5 members to use alternative, euphemistic terminology. Due to the legally mandated obligation to intervene once a situation is labeled genocide, alternative terms are readily adopted. Most commonly, terms such as “ethnic cleansing,” “mass murder,” or “genocidal acts” are employed in order to avoid the legal implications of framing an atrocity as genocide.⁹¹

All the P5 nations utilized such linguistic avoidance practices in relation to the situation in Srebrenica from 1995 onwards. The manner in which the US, UK, and France use genocidal euphemisms within Security Council debates shares a number of similarities. From 1995 to approximately 2005, all three nations employed similar euphemisms to linguistically distance themselves from framing Srebrenica as a genocide. The euphemisms predominantly used in this period include references to “atrocities,” a “humanitarian crisis,” and “mass murder” occurring in Srebrenica.

The use of euphemisms after 2005 shifts slightly towards words more commonly associated with avoiding the genocide label, the most common being “massacre.” Similarities are again seen between the US and the UK, with both placing the killings in Srebrenica in a wider global context while still avoiding the use of the genocide label. Such practices are exemplified in the following exchange.

US: He [Radovan Karadžić] stands accused as an architect of the Srebrenica massacre, the single worst crime committed on European soil since the Second World War.⁹²

UK: I think it is impossible to talk about Bosnia without talking about Srebrenica. I do not think that anybody can remain unmoved by the fate of the over 7,000 Muslim men and boys

24, 2016, <http://scholarlycommons.law.case.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1268&context=jil>.

⁸⁷ Gruenberg, *An Analysis UNSC Resolutions*, 483.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 483.

⁸⁹ Carla Monteleone, “Coalition Building in the UN Security Council,” *International Relations* 29, no. 1 (2014), 51, accessed August 12, 2016, doi: 10.1177/0047117814552140.

⁹⁰ Do Monte, *The Pen is Mightier*, 674.

⁹¹ Blum et al., *Ethnic Cleansing Bleaches Atrocities*, 204.

⁹² United Nations, *7332nd Meeting of the Security Council*, New York, December 10, 2014 (UN Doc. S/PV.7332).

who were massacred, as several people have said, in the worst atrocity in Europe since the Second World War.⁹³

Even when referring to the indictments of Karadžić and Mladić by the ICTY, the UK and the US engage with euphemistic language, despite the fact that both men were indicted for genocide predicated on their alleged roles in the Srebrenica killings. Following the 2007 ICJ determination that these killings legally constitute genocide, euphemisms continued to be employed by all the P5 nations, with the Srebrenica genocide most commonly framed as a “massacre.”⁹⁴ The manner in which France and the UK framed the genocide in Srebrenica also changed after 2010, with euphemisms no longer employed, but rather, the killings being framed as genocide indirectly, through reference to decisions of the ICJ or ICTY. The US, the most variable in terms of its use of euphemisms, continues to frame Srebrenica in such a manner in 2014 and 2015, even though it makes explicit genocide references over the same time period.

In contrast to the US, the UK, and France, neither Russia nor China rely significantly on the use of genocide euphemisms in relevant statements. Russia only frames the Srebrenica genocide using euphemistic rhetoric in five Security Council debates from 1995 to 2015, while China utilizes such rhetoric in three of these debates. Such euphemisms solely occur in 1995 and during the debate concerning whether to officially label Srebrenica a genocide in 2015. Unlike the US, the UK, and France, China does not make reference to Srebrenica as a “massacre,” instead, employing more formal and impassive linguistic rhetoric, presenting the killings either as a “violation of international humanitarian law” or as a “tragedy.”⁹⁵ Unlike China, Russia employs a variety of euphemisms including references to “monstrous crimes,” “ethnic cleansing,” and referring to the “tragedy at Srebrenica” as exemplified by the following statement made on July 8, 2015:

when a delegation from Bosnia and Herzegovina first approached us about the need to commemorate the twentieth anniversary of the tragedy at Srebrenica, we agreed that it should be done in a solemn manner, given the special sensitivity of the issue for people living in Bosnia and Herzegovina and the region as a whole.⁹⁶

In contrast to these limited uses of euphemisms with regards to the Srebrenica genocide, for the most part, silence is the most common discourse within the documents analyzed, as Srebrenica is only referenced by Russia and China at times in which such rhetoric could not be avoided.

Akin to the genocide label, the use of euphemisms is also highly politicized with a plethora of variables impacting the way in which nations avoid labeling an atrocity as genocide. With respect to the use of euphemisms in framing Srebrenica, such variables include historical reluctance, national political stakes, and Security Council politics. The use of language within the Security Council is highly political and the use of particular words can have a profound effect on multilateral diplomacy.⁹⁷ As noted previously, Dunne and Gifkins assert that this politicization of linguistic frames stems from the emphasis on adhering to previously agreed language.⁹⁸ The consistent use of euphemisms, most commonly by France, the US, and the UK, allows for the continued presentation and reaffirmation of a particular position. Labeling an act as genocide would not only have incurred legal and moral responsibilities, but would have been difficult, given the consistent perpetuation and reaffirmation of euphemisms. Altering this normalized discourse and presenting an alternative linguistic frame in the case of the Srebrenica genocide would have presented considerable challenges and offered little in the way of political gain for any of the P5 nations. The

⁹³ United Nations, *5675th Meeting of the Security Council*, New York, May 16, 2007 (UN Doc. S/PV.5675).

⁹⁴ *Bosnia and Herzegovina v. Serbia and Montenegro*, International Court of Justice, February 26, 2007.

⁹⁵ United Nations, *7481st Meeting of the Security Council*, New York, July 8, 2015 (UN Doc. S/PV.7481) (Statement by Chinese representative Liu Jieyi that “the conflict that occurred in the former Yugoslavia two decades ago is a dark page in history. China expresses its condolences for the deaths of innocent civilians in Srebrenica and elsewhere. The international community should reflect deeply on history so as to prevent the reoccurrence of such a tragedy.”).

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

⁹⁷ Do Monte, *The Pen is Mightier*, 671.

⁹⁸ Dunne and Gifkins, *Libya and the State*, 523.

Rwandan genocide provides a comparable example of a linguistic reluctance to label a genocide as such. It was not until there were tangible political motivations to explicitly label the Rwandan genocide as a genocide that the use of previously agreed language became less advantageous and the genocide label was adopted. This notion of the strong preference for adhering to previously agreed language also provides an explanation for the aforementioned point regarding the variability in the use of euphemisms and engagement with the genocide label of the US. Engaging in such a clear shift in rhetoric within an international organization, where such a discourse has not yet become normalized, may have presented difficulties for the US. This argument becomes more clear as the media only reinforced the dominance of previously agreed language, with Velagic and Velagic finding that journalists most commonly framed Srebrenica as an instance of “ethnic cleansing,” even after the 2007 ICJ finding that genocide had been committed in Srebrenica.⁹⁹ If consensus exists regarding previously agreed language, it is not only between the P5 nations; such sentiment is also echoed within the media, in that there is little to be gained from altering dominant linguistic discourses.¹⁰⁰ Akin to Gifkins’ assertion that language is not simply words devoid of meaning, Jackson notes that neutrality in language is not possible, as words have histories and acquire meaning through discursive settings.¹⁰¹ The word genocide attracts immediate comparisons to past atrocities, most notably, the Holocaust and Rwandan genocide, and to apply this term to the killings in Srebrenica would have highlighted yet another international humanitarian failure. Such an acknowledgment was not in the interest of any of the P5 nations. Consequently, it was more attractive to the P5 nations to avoid the power and associated connotations of the genocide label when referencing the Srebrenica killings.

The avoidance of the genocide label identified from the data also aligns with literature concerning the domestic interests of the US and France. The observed reliance on euphemisms to frame Srebrenica enabled the US to initially avoid putting their military personnel in harm’s way. This was of particular significance to the US following the death of eighteen soldiers two years earlier in Somalia.¹⁰² Similarly, France’s framing of Srebrenica may have been influenced by their alleged complicity in the Rwandan genocide. An independently commissioned report released by the Rwandan government in 2008 condemns most Western nations for their failure to prevent or halt the genocide, however, the allegations made against France go much further, identifying possible military complicity in the genocide.¹⁰³ Avoiding accusations of further neglect in relation to a genocide that occurred on European soil may have been seen by France as part of a broader strategy to deflect attention from its role in Rwanda and to thereby help avoid subsequent legal repercussions.¹⁰⁴

The way in which Russia and China frame Srebrenica through the use of euphemisms differs from that of the US, the UK, and France. Both Russia and China employed silence as their dominant discourse when the issue of the Srebrenica killings were raised in P5 discussions, and only resorted to the use of euphemisms when maintaining this silence became effectively impossible, specifically during the commission of the genocide itself in 1995 and during the debate concerning whether to officially label Srebrenica a genocide in 2015. When euphemisms were used, particularly by Russia, the previous dominant frame of silence allowed for more weight and power to be ascribed to particular linguistic features given the rarity of any reference to Srebrenica whatsoever. Unlike the US, the UK, and France, Russia’s eventual framing of the Srebrenica killings as a “massacre”

⁹⁹ Velagic and Velagic, *Do Court Rulings Matter*, 421.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Jackson, *Writing the War on Terrorism*, 76; *Bosnia and Herzegovina v. Serbia and Montenegro*, International Court of Justice, February 26, 2007.

¹⁰² David Forsythe, “The UN Security Council and Response to Atrocities: International Criminal Law and the P-5,” *Human Rights Quarterly* 34, no. 3 (2012), 843, accessed August 8, 2016, doi: 10.1353/hrq.2012.0054.

¹⁰³ Paul Schmitt, “The Future of Genocide Suits at the International Court of Justice: France’s role in Rwanda and Implications of the Bosnia V. Serbia Decision,” *Georgetown Journal of International Law* 40, no. 2 (2009), 587, accessed August 13, 2016, <http://go.galegroup.com.ezp01.library.qut.edu.au/ps/i.do?p=LT&u=qut&id=GALE|A195265742&v=2.1&it=r&sid=summon>.

¹⁰⁴ Hazel Cameron, “The French Connection: Complicity in the 1994 Genocide in Rwanda,” *African Security* 8, no. 2 (2015), 107, accessed September 17, 2016, doi: 10.1080/19392206.2015.1036669.

immediately became the country's official position, due to its previous silence. Schroter asserts that one of the central functions of silence is to restrict the potential for opposition.¹⁰⁵ In effect, by not engaging with the use of euphemisms, Russia and China limited the opportunity for the other P5 nations to provide opposing rhetoric. This not only demonstrates the unique framing on the part of Russia and China, but also identifies the power of linguistic silence.

The framing of Srebrenica by Russia and China, especially their use of silence, may be due to a number of explanations. With respect to international foreign policy, Russia and China view collaboration as a counterweight to US hegemony through the promotion of a multipolar, as opposed to a unipolar, international discourse. Both nations seek to avoid being taken for granted by other P5 nations.¹⁰⁶ Monteleone notes that Russia and China engage in a number of practices reminiscent of a coalition, such as limiting engagement with the dominant coalition (i.e. the US, the UK, and France), as well as joint abstentions and vetoes.¹⁰⁷ However, their reasons for collaboration differ significantly. China's behavior in the Security Council is commonly associated with self-interest and a focus on economic objectives.¹⁰⁸ As such, China is unlikely to label Srebrenica a genocide given the potential economic costs of intervention and its indifference towards human rights issues.¹⁰⁹

The bilateral political and economic dialogue between Russia and Serbia also represents as a likely factor contributing to Russia's use of euphemisms and general silence regarding the Srebrenica genocide. Serbia is a pivotal ally of Russia, especially in maintaining Russia's influence in the Balkans.¹¹⁰ By avoiding the genocide label through euphemisms and adopting silence as its dominant discourse, Russia both protected its political and economic interests, and promoted an alternate discourse to that of the US, the UK, and France coalition.

Conclusion

The discourse analysis of 32 UN Security Council debates related to the Srebrenica genocide between 1995 and 2015 discussed in this article demonstrates how the P5 nations selectively framed this event according to each nation's own beliefs and strategic interests. Moreover, the politicization of the rhetoric used in referring to the Srebrenica genocide appears to also have varied according to domestic policy considerations, Security Council power politics, and the complexities of language use within an international arena, wherein multiple actors are involved over time. Future studies of language use within Security Council debates should focus on other acts of genocide in order to ascertain if the trends identified in this article are replicated. An analysis of language used in other documents relevant to the Srebrenica genocide, such as ICTY or ICJ decisions, would also provide a helpful dataset.

While some may argue the use of language within the UN Security Council is mere incidental semantic variation, the continued avoidance of the genocide label within the Security Council in relation to the Srebrenica genocide supports the thesis that the P5 nations use language as a mechanism to frame a conflict in a particular manner that aligns with their own political interests. As such, this article reaffirms the importance of genocide recognition as more than a legal issue. Rather, such recognition, or lack thereof, in various fora, including the official statements of the P5

¹⁰⁵ Melani Schroter, *Silence and Concealment in Political Discourse* (Lancaster: John Benjamin's Publishing Company, 2015), 14.

¹⁰⁶ Do Monte, *The Pen is Mightier*, 677; European Parliament, *The Positions of Russia and China at the UN Security Council in the Light of Recent Crisis*, March 1, 2013, [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/note/join/2013/433800/EXPO-SEDE_NT\(2013\)433800_EN.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/note/join/2013/433800/EXPO-SEDE_NT(2013)433800_EN.pdf).

¹⁰⁷ Monteleone, *Coalition Building in the UN Security Council*, 58.

¹⁰⁸ Sally Morphet, "China as a Permanent Member of the Security Council," *Security Dialogue* 31, no. 2 (2000), 155, accessed August 8, 2016, 155, doi: 10.1177/0967010600031002002.

¹⁰⁹ European Parliament, *The Positions of Russia and China*, 8; Morphet, *China as a Permanent Member*, 155.

¹¹⁰ Bartosz Marcinkowski, "Balkan's Bad Boy Goes West Serbia's Challenges on the way to the EU," *The Polish Quarterly of International Affairs* 24, no. 3 (2015), 63, accessed September 11, 2016, <http://search.proquest.com.ezp01.library.qut.edu.au/docview/1757725978?pq-origsite=summo>; Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Serbia, *Bilateral Relations with Foreign Countries*, accessed August 29, 2016, <http://www.mfa.gov.rs/sr/index.php/spoljna-politika/bilateralni-odnosi/117-bilateralni-odnosi/11519-ruska-federacija?lang=cyr>.

Security Council nations, has the ability to increase or decrease communal violence and revenge, and to either help alleviate or perpetuate, transgenerational cultural trauma associated with denial.

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