

The following Foreword to 'Zero Degrees of Empathy' ('The Science of Evil') was invited by Dr Aleksandar Dimitrijevic, Department of Psychology, Belgrade University, Serbia. I am grateful to him for his careful translation of my book from English into Serbian.

I sent him the Foreword by email on June 2nd 2012 and heard nothing more. Evidently, the publisher, Clio, decided not to include it in my book – I assume because it refers to an uncomfortable period of Serbian history (1992-1995).

Strangely, they put a Serbian translation of my Foreword on their blog at <http://blog.clio.rs/2013/04/sajmon-baron-koen-povodom-srpskog-izdanja-psihologije-zla/#more-107> on the 24th April 2013.

For those who want to read this in English, it is reproduced here:

I am pleased to see that Zero Degrees of Empathy has been translated in Serbian. I am also grateful for the opportunity to write a Foreword to this translation. The erosion of empathy can happen anywhere and the events that unfolded in Bosnia and Herzegovina in 1992-1995 are the clearest reminder of how fragile empathy is and how - under certain social and political conditions - it can be shut down. I am not a historian, so I leave it to that profession to determine the veracity of the following information:

My first source is the Human Rights Watch website: "Two of the concentration camps, Omarska and Keraterm, were places where killings, torture, and brutal interrogations were carried out. The third, Trnopolje, had another purpose; it functioned as a staging area for massive deportations of mostly women, children, and elderly men, and killings and rapes also occurred there. The fourth, Manjaca, was referred to by the Bosnian Serbs as a 'prisoner of war camp' although most if not all detainees were civilians... The Commission of Experts determined that the systematic destruction of the Bosniak community in the Prijedor area met the definition of genocide."

My second source is extracted from the Wikipedia website: "The Srebrenica massacre in July 1995 resulted in the killing of more than 8,000 Bosniaks (Bosnian Muslims), mainly men and boys, by units of the Army of Republika Srpska (VRS). The mass murder was described by the Secretary-General of the United Nations as the worst crime on European soil since the Second World War. In 2004, the Appeals Chamber of the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) ruled that the massacre constituted genocide. The forcible transfer of between 25,000 to 30,000 Bosniak women, children and elderly that accompanied the massacre was found to be confirming evidence of the genocidal intent of members of the VRS Main Staff. In February 2007 the International Court of Justice (ICJ) concurred with the ICTY judgment".

This book seeks to understand under what conditions ordinary human beings can

lose their empathy. War is one such set of conditions, such that we are prone to defend our own group and demonize the out-group. In such a state of mind, we can dehumanize the other group, seeing them as without rights, feelings, and as mere objects. War encapsulates many of the social factors (conformity, obedience to authority, propaganda, and extreme ideological beliefs) that can erode empathy, but there are also a host of biological factors that can cause the empathy circuit in the brain to shut down or fail to develop in the usual way. And of course biology and social factors interact.

Empathy is one of the most valuable human resources: without it we become able to hurt one another, but with it we are able to seek reconciliation, even after the worst crimes. Through empathy there is a chance that the aggressor's belief that he is 100% right will give way to an apology for his hurtful actions; that the victim's pain will reduce by feeling he or she is being heard; and that both people will achieve the bigger picture of seeing there are multiple perspectives, not just their own.

*Simon Baron-Cohen,
Cambridge 2012*