Where Will the Fingers Point to Next?

For those who do reach closure, who are able to move on, there is no more finger pointing. They might wake up one morning and look at the world and their lives through different eyes. Then again, closure neither requires loving nor liking thy neighbor, but simply getting along with them in a civil manner.

The text message read, "Radovan Karadzic arrested." That explained the honking that I heard from my flat high above Marsala Tita. I was soon on the street to join the crowd that was forming in front of the Eternal Flame to celebrate this historic moment in recent Bosnian history. What better place to celebrate the arrest of one of the architects of the destruction of Bosnia and its people than the monument that commemorates the victims of an earlier war.

Not long after the crowd formed, the cars began to come to a halt, blocking the thoroughfare to all traffic; and the crowd began to chant, among other things, "Ovo je Bosna!" This spontaneous outpouring of energy that was heard throughout the city was itself a testimony to what the war and its carnage meant to generations of Bosnians.

Yet all were not pleased, as shown by a lone individual who darted through the crowd to attack the flame itself. No doubt this individual is not alone in harboring feelings that run contrary to those of many Bosnians. Just as important is how few people actually did take to the streets, a fact that some might not want to acknowledge. And when it comes to atrocities committed during the war, there are many others who need to be brought to justice, including the most well-known of them, Ratko Mladic. Perhaps Mladic will suffer a similar fate in the days and weeks to come if those who know his whereabouts want to collect a reward or simply want to do the right thing.

If the day ever comes when justice is served to Karadzic and Mladic, then what? Where will the fingers point to next? Of course, there are many more persons who in some way contributed directly to the upheaval and carnage, and who have not been apprehended and sent to The Hague or elsewhere. Karadzic and Mladic were the evil strategists, never the trigger-pulling murderers who looked into the eyes of their victims before silencing them. Thousands of other persons carried out the orders that flowed down the chain of command. But at what point will the people of Bosnia and Herzegovina tire of finger pointing? How far into their own neighborhoods will they reach to achieve closure to what torments them?

The rapture exhibited by many that night says a lot about the importance they had given to the apprehension of the Bosnian Serb leader and how cathartic the experience may have been for them. In a collective sense, closure might be brought about by dispensing justice to people like Karadzic. But those persons whose loved ones and friends were raped and murdered, or whose lives were destroyed in countless other ways, might not gain any closure, knowing that the culprits remain at large, possibly drinking coffee at the neighborhood café. May be these are some of the people who remained at home that morning, continuing to be tormented while others were cheering in the streets. If those who continue to suffer need the killers punished for there to be closure, then most of those people will continue to be tormented for years to come. In fact, there will never be an end to the grief of some, for there will come a time when the people at large will lose interest in searching amongst themselves for those responsible for past brutalities. No doubt this process of "moving on" has begun in the minds of some. The cruelest act will come when neighbor turns away from neighbor; when some are no longer willing to listen to a father's grief over his daughter's murder. For those who do reach closure, who are able to move on, there is no more finger pointing. They might wake up one morning and look at the world and their lives through different eyes. Then again, closure neither requires loving nor liking thy neighbor, but simply getting along with them in a civil manner.

By Professor Rory J. Conces