

CONFLICTING
REMEMBRANCE:
The Memory of
the Macedonian
2001 in Context

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Editors:
Naum Trajanovski and Lidija Georgieva

**CONFLICTING REMEMBRANCE:
THE MEMORY OF THE MACEDONIAN 2001 IN CONTEXT**

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Skopje, 2023

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ABBREVIATIONS

ARBiH – Army of Bosnia and Herzegovina

ARM – Army of the Republic of Macedonia

BiH – Bosnia and Herzegovina

DUI – Democratic Union for Integration (North Macedonia)

EU – European Union

ICRC – Inter-Community Relations Committee

ICTY – International Crime Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia

INH – Institute of National History in Skopje

ISCHA – Institute of Spiritual and Cultural Heritage of the Albanians

IZ – Islamic Community (Bosnia and Herzegovina)

KLA – Kosovo Liberation Army

MOC – Macedonian Orthodox Church

MPRC – Missing Persons Resource Center

NATO – North Atlantic Treaty Organization

NGO – Non-Governmental Organization

NLA – National Liberation Army

OFA – Ohrid Framework Agreement

OSA – Open Society Archives

SBB – Union for a Better Future (Bosnia and Herzegovina)

SBiH – Party for Bosnia and Herzegovina (Bosnia and Herzegovina)

SDA – Party of Democratic Action (Bosnia and Herzegovina)

SDSM – Social Democratic Union of Macedonia

TD – Territorial Defence

UN – United Nations

UNSC – United Nations Security Council

UNTAES – United Nations Transitional Administration for Eastern Slavonia, Baranja and Western Sirmium

USA – United States of America

VMRO-DPMNE – Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization-Democratic Party for Macedonian National Unity

VRS – Bosnian Serb Army

YAP – Yugoslavia Archive Project

YPA – Yugoslav People's Army

BIOGRAPHIES

EDITORS

Naum Trajanovski, a PhD graduate from the Institute of Philosophy and Sociology of the Polish Academy of Sciences, is an assistant at the Institute of Sociology, University of Warsaw. His major academic interests include memory politics, nationalism studies, and sociological knowledge-transfers in East Central and South East Europe. Since 2017, he is researching various aspects of remembering, commemorating, and memorializing the 2001 conflict in Macedonia. He is an author of a book on the Museum of the Macedonian struggle and the Macedonian memory politics (Templum, 2020) and a co-editor of a volume on the cultures and politics of remembrance in the Balkans (forumZFD – Institute of Ethnology and Anthropology – Institute of National History, 2021). Naum is a co-chair of the Memory Studies Association’s South-East Europe Regional Group.

Lidija Georgieva has been a professor at the Faculty of Philosophy in Skopje since 1997. In 2000-01, she was a Fulbright Scholar at the University of Maryland. Lidija was Head of the Center for Intercultural Studies and Research (2012-18), UNESCO Chairholder (2014-18) and a member of the Center for Strategic Research at the Macedonian Academy of Sciences (since 2022). Her research interests are peace and security- and international and intercultural studies. She was leading the Macedonian teams of the H2020: RETOPEA and CONNEKT projects, and working on the IVF-supported project “V4. Theory of International Relations and Conflict Resolution” (2014-19), “The Role of Peace Education and Contact Hypothesis” (Swedish Research Council, in cooperation with the University of Gothenburg, 2014-16), “Patterns of Conflict Resolution” (Institute for British-Irish Studies, University College Dublin, 2011) and the TEMPUS Project II and III Cycle International relations study programs Enhancing dialogue and cooperation through intercultural dialogue and research.

INTERVIEWEES

Arbnora Memeti graduated in journalism studies from the Ss. Cyril and Methodius University in Skopje. She has a working experience as a journalist and she currently works as both a photojournalist and a journalist for domestic and foreign media. The major focus of her professional journalistic interest is on everyday social issues. She is a trainee of the Peace Action's "10 Days of Peace Republic" program and she was photographing for the "Site naši solzi/Gjithë lotët tanë" exhibition. Arbnora was a researcher for the research project which resulted into the interactive map of commemorations related to the 2001 conflict in Macedonia sponsored by FES.

Boro Kitanoski is a peace worker at Peace Action, North Macedonia, working on the Dealing with the past program. He is born in 1976 in Prilep and he is one of the founders of the association Peace Action in 2001. Has a long experience of work on various positions in national, regional (Balkan) and international programs on peacebuilding, dealing with the past, peace education, antidiscrimination, and conscientious objection. He has a long trainer's experience in the areas of peacebuilding, oral history, peace education, nonviolent action, and work with war veterans. Boro was a National Coordinator of the RECOM Initiative (2010-11), a Member of the Executive Committee of War Resisters' International (WRI, 2006-10), and an internationally elected Member of the WRI Council (2006-14).

Elena B. Stavrevska is a feminist peace scholar, a lecturer in International Relations at the School of Sociology, Politics, and International Studies at the University of Bristol, and a member of the YugoslaWomen+ Collective. She previously worked as a research officer at the LSE Centre for Women, Peace and Security, a visiting research fellow at the Kroc Institute for International Peace Studies, University of Notre Dame, a postdoctoral teaching fellow at Bard College Berlin, and a work-package coordinator and researcher in the EU-funded project Cultures of Governance and Conflict Resolution in Europe and India at the Central European University. Her research and

published work have explored issues of intersectionality, justice, and political economy in conflict-affected societies, with a particular focus on Bosnia and Herzegovina and Colombia. She is currently co-editing (together with Dr. Slađana Lazić) a special issue on feminist and decolonial approaches to peace. Beyond her academic work, Elena is a co-founder of Stella, which initiated the first mentorship programme for women and girls in higher education in Macedonia. She is also the initiator of the #WomenAlsoKnowBalkans list, in an effort to facilitate the inclusion of women in policy and media discussions in and about the region.

Vlora Rechica is a researcher and head of the Center for Parliamentary Support and Democratization within the Institute for Democracy. She holds a Master's degree in Comparative Politics, specialising in Democracy and Democratization, from the London School of Economics and Political Science. Her research and advocacy focus is on parliaments and parliamentary democracy, institutional building, populism, and democratisation processes in emerging democracies.

AUTHORS

Ana Čupeska is an associate professor at the Political Science Department, Iustinianus Primus Faculty of Law, University of Ss. Cyril and Methodius in Skopje. She holds an MS degree in international relations and a Ph.D. in political science. Ana is the head of the Political Science Master Collegium at the Political Science Department. She is a member of the Scientific Council of the Foundation for European Progressive Studies and part of the editorial boards of several academic journals, such as *Iustinianus Primus Law Review*, *Macedonian Contemporary Defense*, and Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung's *Challenges*. Ana is a president of the NGO Transparency Macedonia and a vice president of the Macedonian Political Science Association. She is a member of the Greek-North Macedonia's Joint Interdisciplinary Committee of Experts on historical, archaeological, and educational issues related to the Prespa Agreement.

Ana Ljubojević is a research associate at the University of Ljubljana within the EIRENE project. Previously, she was a Marie Curie postdoctoral fellow at the Centre for Southeast European Studies, University of Graz, Austria. She obtained her Ph.D. in political systems and institutional change at the Institute for Advanced Studies in Lucca, Italy. Ana has conducted research on non-judicial mechanisms of transitional justice in Croatia and Serbia and has research interests in memory studies, cultural trauma, and the social production of memory. Some of her most recent publications include “Memory (Re)cycling: The Pilgrimage to Vukovar Remembrance Day” (*Contemporary Southeastern Europe*, 2022), “Walking the Past, Acting the Past? Peace March to Srebrenica Commemoration” (*Nationalities Papers*, 2021) and “Changing Memoryscapes in Post-Yugoslav Countries: Social (Re)construction of Places of Memory” (*Contemporary Southeastern Europe*, 2022).

Csaba Szilágyi is a chief archivist and head of the Human Rights Program at the Vera and Donald Blinken Open Society Archives and a teaching fellow at the Departments of Legal Studies and History at Central European University in Budapest/Vienna. Intermittently, he was an archival consultant for Human Rights Watch and the Open Society Foundations in New York, and the Srebrenica Memorial Center Archive in Potočari. Currently, he is a Ph.D. candidate at the Amsterdam School for Heritage, Memory, and Material Culture at the University of Amsterdam. He is interested in questions related to archiving records on and memorialization of contemporary mass atrocities, as well as in archival traces and narratives of the global refugee experience. As an activist archivist, he pursues critical archiving for inclusion, multivocality, and informational reparation, as well as for protecting and promoting human rights and mitigating social injustice in recordkeeping. He is also working on enhancing synergies between institutional archives and community archival initiatives. His Ph.D. research focuses on the roles, responsibilities, and limitations of archives/archiving in managing the heritage of, creating knowledge on, and transforming memory politics relating to the recent wars in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Korab Krasniqi is a civil society activist and researcher on dealing with the past, transitional justice, and memory work. He is currently completing MA studies in Political Science at the University of Prishtina. He holds a BA degree in Psychology. He attended the fellowship program at Columbia University, NYC, on Historical Dialogue and Accountability and was part of numerous educational programs on dealing with the past educational, locally and internationally. For the past eight years, he has been working with forumZFD, an international organization working on Peace Education and Dealing with the Past.

Perica Jovčevski is a PhD student in Political Theory at the Doctoral School of Political Science, Public Policy and International Relations at the Central European University in Vienna. His main research interests are in political and moral philosophy, more particularly in the nature and value of personal autonomy, distributive and relational justice, war, punishment and the ethics of memory. His broader research interests include normative issues regarding archives/archiving and LGBTQI+ histories. He was an affiliate of the Vera and Donald Blinken Open Society Archives in Budapest for over six years (2015-2022). Within the Blinken OSA Human Rights Program, he worked on re-archiving and researching of archival records from the period of the Yugoslav Wars, as part of the Yugoslavia Archive Project. Together with Csaba Szilágyi, he developed further the self-reflexive archival methodology used in the project, which they have presented together at various conferences and workshops in Budapest, Dubrovnik, Galway, Sarajevo, Vancouver, and Vienna. In 2021 he co-founded with Csaba Szilágyi, the Blinken OSA LGBTQI+ Collective Archive Project. He is the curator of the “Records Uncovered” exhibitions (vol.1 and vol.2) which offer a comprehensive and comparative perspective on the development of LGBTQI+ histories in Central and Southeastern Europe from the end of World War II to 1999.

Petar Todorov studied history at Ss. Cyril and Methodius University of Skopje, earned his MA degree at the École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales in Paris in 2006 and his Ph.D. degree from the Ss Cyril and Methodius University of Skopje in 2013. His research

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Tomasz Rawski is a political and cultural sociologist focused on researching memory politics, nationalism/nation-building, and state socialism in contemporary Eastern Europe and beyond. He authored a book on Bosniak nationalism in Bosnia and Herzegovina after 1995 and several articles in renowned journals, including *East European Politics and Societies*, *International Journal of Comparative Sociology*, and *Problems of Post-Communism*. He participated in several research projects focused on memory politics, including *H2020: REPASt* and *H2020: DisTerrMem*. He was a visiting scholar at University College London, Uppsala University, and the University of Sarajevo.

Vjollca Islami Hajrullahu holds a bachelor's degree in Psychology and a master's degree in Social and Organizational Psychology. She has twenty years of work experience in civil society and public institutions. For the last seven years, she has been cooperating with forumZFD, an international organization working on Peace Education and Dealing with the Past.

Vjollca Krasniqi is an associate professor at the Faculty of Philosophy and the Faculty of Arts, University of Prishtina. She holds a Ph.D. in Social Work from the University of Ljubljana, an M.Sc. degree in Gender, Development, and Globalization from the London School of Economics and Political Science, and a BA degree in Philosophy and Sociology from the University of Prishtina. Her research interests are gender, human rights, nation-building, and social policy. She has led and participated in numerous international research projects and published widely on

these issues. She is actively engaged in gender equality activism and dealing with the past in Kosovo and the wider Balkan region. She has served on the Board of Directors of several civil society organizations in Kosovo.

INTRODUCTION

Naum Trajanovski

Lidija Georgieva

The summer of 2022 was eventful in Macedonian political life.¹ As Bulgarian-North Macedonia negotiations—encouraged by the French Presidency of the EU Council—were reaching closure in late June, the Macedonian political opposition mobilized protests in the capital city of Skopje. The protestors rallied around the idea of rejecting the so-called “French proposal” for solving the bilateral stalemate and lifting the Bulgarian veto of North Macedonia’s start of EU accession talks. More precisely, they protested against alleged concessions related to the ethnic Macedonian identity, the Macedonian language, and to the Constitution, that the Republic of North Macedonia would ultimately have to make in the coming accession negotiations with the EU.

A particular scapegoat of the protesters was the incumbent Minister of Foreign Affairs of North Macedonia, Bujar Osmani, an ethnic Albanian, who was one of the leaders of North Macedonia’s team of negotiators. He came to the forefront of the protesters’ attention after his statement of 2 July that an eventual refusal of the proposal, and a consequent halt to North Macedonia’s EU integrations, might spark “interethnic tensions” in the state (Džunova, 2022). Just days after this statement, several participants in the protest marches clashed with a number of ethnic Albanians in Skopje’s Skanderbeg Square on their way to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs’ building, resulting in an exchange of hard projectiles and gunshots. Although the shooter (of Albanian ethnicity) was immediately arrested, and

¹ We refer to the state name of North Macedonia and the corresponding ethnic and national adjectives in accordance with the 2018 Greco-Macedonian Agreement. All the translations in the introductory text are ours.

the protesters changed their route as of the next day, the event was by and large reported as yet another illustration that the trigger for escalating interethnic—and, in particular, Macedonian-Albanian—tensions in North Macedonia is constantly at hand.

In the course of the very same week, a Tetovo-based journalist published photos of several people in Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) uniforms walking in the city to attend a commemoration of a fellow KLA fighter; a photo which was extensively shared on social media, oftentimes referring to Osmani's statement (Apostolov, 2022). Besides the heated atmosphere, the early July events reached an endpoint with the Parliament of North Macedonia's approval of the "French proposal" on 16 July. However, such a consensus was lacking in June 2022 when a legal project—regarding some of the most pressing issues for the families of the state security forces who were slain in 2001—was not pushed forward. The public debate, moreover, was loaded with recurring ethnically-centred narratives over 2001 and another impasse was hence to be anticipated.

The above vignette demonstrates one of the dominant ways of evoking interethnic relations in the public discourse in North Macedonia: by building upon and referencing the history of tensions between the ethnic communities. The critical episode, in this regard, is certainly the 2001 armed conflict in Macedonia. Resulting in more than 200 casualties, approximately 90 civilian victims, and 170,000 internally displaced persons and refugees, the seven months of hostilities brought the state to the verge of a full-fledged civil war. The armed exchanges were eventually settled with the Ohrid Framework Agreement (OFA) on 13 August 2001. Brokered by foreign diplomats and signed by representatives of the largest political parties in the state (Markovikj and Damjanovski, 2018), the OFA did not just contribute to an end to the hostilities but also facilitated, *inter alia*, a political decentralization in the Republic of Macedonia and better representation of the ethnic minorities in the state institutions.

However, although successful in deescalating the outburst of violence, as pointed out by **Ana Čupeska** in her contribution to this

volume, the OFA also paved the way for a peculiar citizenship regime where the “citizens realize their rights and duties, and participate in the public sphere solely as members of ethno-national or religious communities”—which Spaskovska, in line with Bauböck, observes as “ethnizenship” (2012: 385). In turn, two separate and mutually exclusive truths about the conflict were developed, while sporadic attempts to objectively discuss the hostilities, develop eventual transitional justice mechanisms, and establish facts about 2001 were by and large sidetracked. As neatly demonstrated by **Petar Todorov** in his chapter, this ideology is also reflected in the historiography, the history education, and the history textbooks published after 2001: they became bicentric instead of monocentric, yet still lack tools for combating antagonisms between the youth from the two dominant ethnic communities in the state.

In this peculiar context, various commemorations related to the conflict became the prevailing triggers for the re-emergence of public discourses about 2001.² Although they mostly recreated and relegitimized the abovementioned bicentric pattern, these events were, and still are, differing in terms of their spatial distribution, levels of formality, organization, agendas, and goals, among other things. A distinctive Macedonian feature is the very fact that a divergent set of commemorative events related to the conflict had already appeared in 2001: mostly informal gatherings, and mourning of the slain soldiers and insurgents, but also the placement of memorial plaques and busts within military barracks and institutional complexes. Ever since, memorial actions have developed in many different directions, oftentimes sparking tensions and disrupting the citizens’ security. Hence, it is safe to presume that the dominant mode of invoking 2001 in contemporary North Macedonia is event-centred and the persistence of the memorial events, in this context, allows for a constant negotiation of the societal optics over the conflict and, ultimately, they inform interethnic relations.

² We use both the notion of memory and the notion of commemoration broadly, in line with the memory studies’ scholarship (overviews in Olick, 2009; Tota and Hagen, 2016; Dutceac and Wüstenberg, 2017).

The initial goal of the research project that we launched in 2021, with the support of FES-Skopje, was to grasp the very nuances of the memory events related to 2001 in Macedonia.³ Drawing upon our previous research of other aspects of the conflict, we proceeded with surveying three types of sources—newspapers and online media outlets, municipal media, and published oral history interviews—during several months in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic.⁴ We developed a coding system—the details of which are provided on the internet platform (and in Georgieva and Trajanovski, 2021)—and managed to create metadata of approximately 300 units related to various memory events: be it, *inter alia*, a formal or informal commemoration, the placement of a memorial object, or a state-sponsored ceremony. The metadata helped us reveal the developments, processes, and critical changes of particular events in a given temporal scope and at different societal levels; or the “archaeology” (Roudometof, 2005) of commemorations which provides solid answers to the questions of agency behind certain events, and of why they assume present-day forms and agendas.

It is important to emphasise, again, that the research focused on publicly available materials about memory events related to the conflict, and not on the history of the conflict itself. In line with Malešević (2019, 14), we believe that the commemorative rituals themselves are not sufficient for shattering the grounded ideology and the structured realm of the nation-state. As such, they reflect the power relations in the state and, especially in the cases of remembering past violence, contribute to a complex identity-building

3 The research team consisted of three coordinators—Naum Trajanovski, Lidija Georgieva, and Nita Starova—and three researchers—Arbnora Memeti, Teodora Mileska, and Risto Saveski. The biographies of all the team members are available on the internet platform.

4 We compared the commemorative practices of the Ohrid Framework Agreement and the Good Friday Agreement (see Georgieva, Trajanovski and Wolffe, 2022) and looked at the radicalizing potentials of the commemorations related to the 2001 conflict in Tetovo, North Macedonia (see Trajanovski and Georgieva, 2022). In addition, Trajanovski (2022) published a short review study of the major patterns of commemorating and memorializing the 2001 conflict in Macedonia.

that involves all the relevant societal parties (Bucholc, 2017). The case of post-2001 Macedonia is immensely interesting in this regard, as the dominant ethnic Macedonian community claimed the status of a victim after the 2001 conflict while also getting involved in one of the most outspoken projects of rebranding-the-nation entitlement in the recent European history.⁵ On the other hand, the ethnic Albanians from Macedonia assumed both the positions of winners of the conflict and victims of the decades-long state-sponsored anti-Albanian discrimination, oftentimes thwarting the commemorative performances of ethnic Macedonians in Albanian dominated areas.

The mapping exercise thus drew upon already published materials and focused on the work of the experts, practitioners, and activists dealing with the past in North Macedonia. As such, it had a goal of providing a structured overview of the past events and activities, and not to prescribe any commemorative model for the future. Hence, we commenced the research with two expert workshops and consulted a group of domestic and international scholars and practitioners regarding the research methodology.⁶ We also took under consideration the dominant modes of media reporting about the events related to the 2001 conflict in Macedonia, although we were primarily focused on the information rather than the discursive framings.⁷ We read the municipal media—official, bulletin-like publications issued by local governments which served for promotion and usually had a more informative tone—and the oral history interviews in the same key.⁸ Initially promoted by NGOs, oral histories gradually became an activist tool for promoting reconciliation and

5 More on the “Skopje 2014 project” in Trajanovski (2020).

6 We would like to thank, in alphabetic order, Ana Aceska, Boro Kitanoski, Fabio Mattioli, Jana Koceska, Marina Tuneva, Paul Reef, Perica Jovčevski, Vasiliki P. Neofotistos, and Vjollca Krasniqi for their participation in the discussions.

7 On the media coverage, see the recent study of Ordanoski (2019).

8 In particular we looked at the following oral history publications: Kitanoski et al., 2013; Taleski et al., 2014; Taleski et al., 2014; Stojanov et al., 2020. We also explored other types of interviews related to 2001, such as expert interviews (for instance, Klekovski, 2011), memoirs and focus group interviews (such as Dimovska and Šabani, 2020).

interethnic solidarity via an emphasis on the local and trans-ethnic histories of trauma, suffering, and victimhood. All the interviews in this edited volume include different experiences with interviewees and interviewing related to 2001.

The idea behind the interviews was to get a more precise narrative on the topics of our interest: the work being done with people who experienced the 2001 conflict and the ways they remember it. Hence **Boro Kitanovski** of Peace Action speaks about the working credo of this pioneering organization and their approach towards the work with veterans of the conflict. **Elena B. Stavrevska** provides insight into her research on intersectionality in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Colombia, and Macedonia. She also dwells upon a recently authored piece of hers on the civilian victims of the conflict, which is part of a collection of analyses of the status, memories, and challenges of the civilian victims in the region (more in Šenkel, 2022). **Vlora Rechica** shares her experiences with interviewing local Albanians and articulates a vocal criticism of the reconciliation process in the state. Finally, **Arbnora Memeti**, who was part of our project's research team, talks about her experience as an interviewer, photographer and journalist in relation to persons who directly witnessed the 2001 shootouts. Arbnora also discusses some of the struggles to obtain the copies of the newspapers in Albania from the 2000s and the 2010s.⁹

One of the project results was an online platform that revolves around an interactive map of commemorations (available at: ofa-2001-2021.mk), which had its premiere on the 20th anniversary of the signing of the OFA. The platform contains brief information about the pinned events, several interpretative frameworks, and a contextual chronology in three languages: Macedonian, Albanian, and English. We decided to proceed with this format for several reasons: we are convinced that such an interactive tool of digital repository can contribute not only towards a better understanding of the commemorative dynamics but also to a better reception of

⁹ Lučić (2022) paints the regional context of “indifference and lethargy” related to archives and archival work related to the Yugoslav Wars.

academic works dealing with the memory of the 2001 conflict in Macedonia. In this context, we can single out the works of Neofotistos (2012; 2021), Nikolovska (2010), and Reef (2018), which deal with different aspects of the memorialization and commemoration of 2001 in post-conflict Macedonia. We also read the bulk of literature on “Skopje 2014” in the key of the 2001 conflict, as well as the literature on the memory aspects of the Yugoslav Wars.

As a final result of this research project, we decided to compile this edited volume with four additional chapters that deal with various regional issues related to memories of violent conflicts. Therefore, the first three studies provide insight into the post-Yugoslav context and demonstrate some of the peculiar national struggles with memory; as such, they all contribute to this volume’s function of a companion not only to the online platform but also to the memory dynamism in post-conflict Macedonia in general. This part opens with the chapter of **Ana Ljubojević**, who uses three cases—the official commemoration of the fall of Vukovar; the grassroots initiative Srebrenica Peace March; and the Serbian Parliament’s Declaration on Srebrenica—to argue that the commemorative practices in sites where war crimes occurred act as a nexus between transitional justice and collective memory, hence providing platforms for putting the “judicial truth” on trial by local and national political actors. The next chapter, authored by **Vjollca Krasniqi**, **Vjollca Islami Hajrullahu**, and **Korab Krasniqi**, approaches this gap by focusing on the memory activism of the families of missing persons in Kosovo and demonstrates how those subjects use the past as a mean for reconciliation in the Kosovar context. Lastly, **Tomasz Rawski**, who recently published a monograph on Bosniak nationalism (2019), deals with the memory politics in Bosnia and Herzegovina by looking at the tensivity between the international community and its memory agenda and the different Bosniak memory actors—and their agendas—in the national arena.

All three above-noted chapters highlight the complexities of the post-conflict constellations, as well as the roles that memorial

events and domestic and transnational memory actors play in these very contexts: contributing both to complex and multi-level peacebuilding and peacebreaking.¹⁰ Our mapping exercise was therefore not conducted in a vacuum as it was informed by the pressing social and political issues of the day, the weaponization of history and memory, and the radicalization of the public discourses. We turned to experts behind the Blinken OSA's Yugoslavia Archive Project—a project which although considerably more far-fetched and different in terms of scope and outcomes, served as our inspiration—for their insights on researching, archiving, digitalizing and, ultimately, positioning towards the bulk of materials related to the violent past in the region. The final chapter written by **Csaba Szilágyi** and **Perica Jovčevski** hence examines the work on television monitoring materials covering the first post-Yugoslav decade (1991-1999) in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, and Serbia. The authors dwell on the epistemic violence/harm twined with the process of record creation and address their strategies for increasing the transparency and accessibility of records via (counter)archival interventions. These interventions, in turn, allow for better inclusivity and social justice-sensitive archives, while at the same time debasing the potency of the exclusivist narratives.

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10 On the notion of peace-breaking, see Visoka (2020). See Fridman (2022, 15-29) for a theoretical account of the “agentic activism” in memory- and peace and conflict studies. For a general overview of the memory agendas of transnational actors in the region, see Neißer (2017) and David (2020).

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AN OASIS OF PEACE OR A PRELUDE TO A CONFLICT: INTERETHNIC RELATIONS IN MACEDONIAN HISTORIOGRAPHY AND HISTORY TEXTBOOKS BEFORE AND AFTER 2001

Petar Todorov

ABSTRACT

The aim of this chapter is to provide a closer look at one of the factors contributing to the antagonism and to interethnic division between ethnic Macedonians and ethnic Albanians. Hence, it focuses on the work of the historians—and the ethno-national historical narratives of the Macedonian historians before and after 2001—and the image of ethnic Albanians in history textbooks. By focusing on the two historiographic journals published in Macedonia and one published in Albanian (in North Macedonia), the chapter also touches upon the work of Albanian historians and the Albanian historical narratives after 2001.

More precisely, this chapter focuses on the work of historians and the ways of instrumentalizing history for political purposes, especially the means of creating inter-ethnic antagonisms via historical interpretations in post-Yugoslav Macedonia. It analyses the patterns of creating images of the *Other*—both the image of the Albanian as created by Macedonian historians, and vice versa—and their reflection in textbook narratives. In the end, it briefly discusses what Macedonian society did, and what it is doing, to prevent future disputes across ethnic lines.

Keywords: *historiography, history textbooks, North Macedonia, interethnic relations, ethno-national historical narratives.*

INTRODUCTION

At the beginning of the 1990s the Republic of Macedonia was frequently portrayed as a positive example during the violent dissolution of socialist Yugoslavia. The common phrase, “achieved independence without shots fired”, can be still heard today by those remembering and narrating the events of the 1990s, and the role Kiro Gligorov (the erstwhile President of the Republic of Macedonia, in office from 1991 to 1999) played at that moment. Because of the peaceful transition, the country was often called an “oasis of peace” within the war-torn Balkans and a state which was successfully policing its multicultural population in the midst of the armed hostilities. However, it is hard to argue that there were no immediate threats to the national security in this period, or that there was no nationalistic rhetoric that could easily have sparked armed incidents and hostilities between the Yugoslav People’s Army and the Macedonian state security forces, as was the case in Croatia and especially in Bosnia and Herzegovina in the 1990s. Although many saw the dangers which the Milosević regime posed and its political and territorial ambitions, the interethnic relations between ethnic Albanians and Macedonians, in fact, presented the most pressing issues for the stability and cohesion of Macedonian society and of the newly established independent state.

Ten years after the state gained its independence, an armed conflict broke between the state forces and a group of Albanian rebels. The conflict brought to the surface the antagonisms between the ethnic Macedonians and the ethnic Albanians in the state, which had been building since the early 1990s. For instance, it was preceded by several deadly incidents that took place in the capital city of Skopje and in towns with Albanian majorities such as Tetovo and Gostivar, over issues related to the status of the Albanians, political rights, and the use of the Albanian language in administration and education. Tensions between major ethnic communities living today in Republic of North Macedonia were also

felt in the period after 2001 too, especially during the rule of the VMRO-DPMNE and DUI coalition from 2008 to 2016.

The aim of this chapter is to provide a closer look at one of the factors contributing to the antagonism and to interethnic division between ethnic Macedonians and ethnic Albanians. Hence, it focuses on the work of the historians—and the ethno-national historical narratives of the Macedonian historians before and after 2001—and the image of ethnic Albanians in history textbooks. In addition, the chapter also touches upon the work of Albanian historians and the Albanian historical narratives after 2001. Before the conflict, there were a few Albanian historians working in the Institute of National History in Skopje (INH). The opening of Albanian scientific institutions in the country (the Institute for Albanian Cultural and Spiritual Heritage and the Tetovo University, ISCHA) increased the number of works which had been largely under-researched from this perspective.

Recent scholarly interest in history textbooks and in history education reveals the broader social and political developments leading to wars and to other tragic events, especially as witnessed in the course of the 19th and 20th centuries of European history (more in Lasig, 2013). The role history textbooks played in the violent breakup of Yugoslavia has also been scrutinized by researchers who underline the argument that the Yugoslav textbooks contributed to the process of creating symbolic barriers between the Yugoslav peoples and even “prepared” young generations for the needs of elites who pushed the society into a violent civil war at the end of the 1980s (for instance, see: Höpken, 1996). In this context, this chapter focuses on the work of historians and the ways of instrumentalizing history for political purposes, especially the means of creating inter-ethnic antagonisms via historical interpretations. More precisely, it analyses the patterns of creating images of the *Other*—both the image of the Albanian as created by Macedonian historians, and vice versa—and their reflection in textbook narratives. In the end, it briefly discusses what Macedonian society did, and what it is doing, to prevent future disputes across ethnic lines.

HISTORIOGRAPHY AND HISTORY TEXTBOOKS BEFORE 2001

During the last decades, much research has dealt with the state of the art of Macedonian historiography and history textbooks. The main conclusions define the dominant narrative in Macedonian historiography as being highly politicized and focused on the question of national identity. This literature reveals that historians are playing an important part in shaping the discourse of the major political parties. Moreover, these historians play an important role in the wider Macedonian society by promoting and creating an understanding of history that frames the question of national identity as a pressing need for defending the Macedonians from the *Others*. A closer look at Macedonian historiography reveals that historians tends to glorify the history of the Macedonian nation, but also to produce a series of historical and political myths, such as the myth of victimization. In this context, Macedonians are defined as victims of their neighbours and, thus, this narrative allows for a reading of interethnic relations in the state through this prism as well.¹ However, these publications are focused on the historiography of Macedonian historians, while the publications of Albanian historians in North Macedonia remain out of the researchers' foci. Today, the Institute of National History is the leading institution for historical research, with more than 40 historians working there, followed by the departments of history (at the Faculty of Philosophy in the University Ss Cyril and Methodius and Tetovo University), the Institute of Spiritual and Cultural Heritage of the Albanians, and the Faculty of Educational Sciences at the University Goce Delčev in Štip. The largest number of these historiographical works has been published in Macedonian in two scientific journals: "The Review of the Institute of National History" (*Glasnik na INI*) has been published since 1955; and "History" (*Istorija*), which has been published by the Association of the Historians from the Republic of Macedonia since 1965. Following the foundation of the ISCHA in 2009, this institution has published its journal "Albanological Studies" (*Studime Albanologjike*).

1 Some of the most noteworthy articles are Brunnbauer, 2003-4; Pichler, 2009; Stefoska, 2013.

There were just a few historiographical works published in the 1990s on the complexity of the relations between ethnic Macedonians and Albanians. Even the historiography dealing with broader questions of the history of the 19th and 20th centuries is predominantly ethnocentric and ignores the complexities of both Ottoman and post-Ottoman societies. The two dominant topics in the domestic historiography dealing with inter-ethnic relations in Macedonia are demography and the political activities of Albanians in Macedonia. For instance, a 1995 paper by a Macedonian historian of the so-called “older generation” trained in the socialist period, frames the demographic changes in the Western parts of the country in these three terms:

- de-Macedonization (*demakedonizacija*) followed by demographic growth of the non-Macedonian population and the overseas migration of Macedonians.
- de-Slavicization (*deslovenizacija*) followed by Albanization (*albanizacija*) in rural and urban areas.
- de-Christianization (*dehristijanizacija*) followed by Muhamedization and Islamization (more in Kiselinovski, 1995: 11-12).²

In the same paper, the author also claims that the “anti-Macedonian demographic changes that took place and are still ongoing in the Republic of Macedonia are seriously influencing the historical status of the Macedonian people in this part of Macedonia [Vardar]” (*ibid*).

The reasons for the changes are different, according to the author, from the index of population growth, migration, that leads to “silent and gradual, but non-reversible ethnic processes” (*ibid*, 12).

Other historians are more explicit in their accusations and even articulate political messages by explaining the demographic changes as “negative” policies of the socialist regime. They also accuse the socialist regime of favouring the Albanian minority, “because to their [Albanian] excessive families the state was granting social and

2 All the translations in the text are done by the author.

healthcare alongside free education [so they] continue to exploit the state so that they can develop their economy”, which is defined as an informal economy (grey economy) (Ačkoska, 1999: 20-21). Moreover, the author of this article goes further in accusing the Albanian community of disloyalty and, “although they are realizing all civic rights, did not participate in the census in 1991, did not vote for the new Constitution in 1991, asked for an ethnic Albanian university in a civic state, arm themselves [...] and continue the fight for realization of the concept Great Albania at the cost of Macedonian ethnic territory” (Ačkoska, 1999: 21).

Another historical episode which is illustrative of the treatment of interethnic relations by historians is the Balkan wars and the division of the region Macedonia in 1912/3. Specifically, in the post-socialist context after 1990, the narrative about the division of Macedonia incorporates Albania as the fourth state that controlled the smallest part of the territory of “ethnographic Macedonia” where ethnic Macedonians lived, i.e. that Albania held Macedonian ethnic territory (Todorovski, 1995: 9). This change is related not only to the reinforcement of nationalist rhetoric since the 1980s—and especially in the 1990s—but also to the rising interethnic tensions between ethnic Macedonians and ethnic Albanians.

It should be mentioned that there were also different approaches to the definition of the role and place Macedonians and Albanians had in the past. It is important to note that the history narratives speak by and large about ethnic territories of both the Macedonians and the Albanians, thus not making a clear distinction between the Macedonians living in and beyond Macedonia and the Albanians living in Macedonia and in other places in the region. In the five-volume *History of the Macedonian People* published in 2000, the sections on the consequences of the Balkan wars and First World War for the region, and notably the elimination of the Ottoman Empire, state that the unrealized national goals of the suppressed peoples—both Albanian and Macedonian—led to a new period of “permanent instability, wars, and [ethnic] intolerance that last until the present day” (Katardžiev,

2000: 11). This interpretation showcases the author's intention to present both the Macedonians and the Albanians as victims of their neighbours' politics and campaigns. However, such examples were also compared with the chauvinistic interpretations and views that present the Albanians as an historical enemy to the Macedonian people.

In addition, the research of the historians is reflected in the history textbooks published in the period after the proclamation of state independence in 1991. History textbooks are published by the state: more precisely, it is the Ministry of Education and Science that publishes the textbooks. In the textbooks published in the 1990s, new topics were introduced covering Albanian history, and that of the Macedonians in Albania. However, the space dedicated to Albanian history was very limited and it was overshadowed by the negative image of the Albanians portrayed in the textbooks. The negative images of the Albanians were strengthened through the use of a variety of negative terms. For example, the ethnonym 'Albanian' is usually accompanied by epithets such as 'criminal bands', 'occupiers', 'tribe', and 'mountaineers' (Panov et al., 2001: 41; Trajanovski, 1997: 76-77). The latter two terms are used synonymously with the more explicitly negative terms 'barbarians' or 'uncivilized people' (Panov et al., 2001: 41; Trajanovski, 1997: 58).

Significantly, the Albanians are the only ethnic group from the Balkans who are not defined as a 'people' (*narod*) in a section of *Istorija za VI Oddelenie* (2001) dealing with the Middle Ages. In the same section, the textbook provides a definition of the term *Skiptar*, thus relativizing the use of the pejorative term *Shiptar* by the ethnic Macedonians (Panov et al., 2001: 41). One of the proposed definitions for this term is 'mountaineers'. The use of these pejorative epithets in the narrative promotes the message that Albanians are very different from the Macedonians and from the other ethnic groups in the Balkans, and essentially culturally inferior. Indeed, the textbook for the seventh-grade claims that the culture of Albanians was less developed in comparison with that of the other peoples of the

Balkans (Trajanovski, 1997: 60-62). Moreover, all people living in a given country or region and who speak a different language from the majority are referred to as *inorodno* (non-native) in these textbooks (Veljanovski et al., 1995: 46). This leads pupils to the conclusion that the Albanians in Macedonia are a non-native population, and therefore can be considered 'outsiders', not truly part of the society.

Another important development is the almost complete omission of the previous narratives relating to cooperation between the Albanians and the Macedonians, as well as of passages in which the two peoples were presented as victims of a common enemy. Only a few such examples remain and they can be found in the sections that depict the history of Albania during Ottoman rule. However, even here, instances of cooperation and joint struggle against the enemy are left out. For example, in the section that deals with the Ilinden Uprising, the passage dedicated to the assistance and involvement of the Albanians is excluded altogether. In *Istorija za VIII Oddelenie* (1992), a clear reflection of the political tensions and problems related to the rights of the Albanian community in Macedonia can be observed; here the relationship between Albania and Yugoslavia after 1948 is defined as 'non-friendly' and 'dishonest'. The narrative asserts that those relations were compromised by Albanian claims that the rights of the Albanian minority in Yugoslavia were not being recognized. The textbook adopts a counter-position, stating that, in Albania, the national rights of Macedonians were not recognized (Kiselinovski et al., 1992: 134). In doing so, it marginalizes concerns about human rights and justifies the secondary position of ethnic Albanians in Macedonian and Yugoslav society.

Hence, it can be said that, in the first post-socialist textbooks, Albanians were represented as culturally inferior aggressors who arrived in Macedonia relatively recently, and who frequently committed acts of barbarism and robbery against the ethnic Macedonians. The ethnic Macedonians, on the other hand, are represented as culturally superior, and as the unfortunate victim of their neighbours and co-citizens, the ethnic Albanians. Such

narratives lend support to a number of political and historical myths connected with Macedonian national ideology and political culture, and have been exploited by both the political and intellectual elites; these include the myth of victimization, the myth of origin, and the myth of superiority over the enemy.

The narrative and definitions used in the historiographical works and history textbooks can be found also in the political discourse after 1990. In their speeches members of the Parliament from the right-wing political parties define the Albanians as one of a group of political rivals, among them Bulgarians, Greeks and Serbians. The Albanians are defined as guests (*gosti*), while Macedonians are hosts (*domakjini*), on the territory of Macedonia; and these guests possess no historical merit for the Macedonian state, and are disloyal and dishonest citizens of the state (more in Bliznakovski, 2020: 119-139). It is obvious that both historical and political discourses share similar elements and views on the position of the Albanians vis-à-vis ethnic Macedonians and the Macedonian state. In this context, the questions of the rights of the Albanian community living in the Republic of Macedonia also provoked nationalistic claims among Albanian intellectuals. Some of them even supported the armed fight of the NLA against the Macedonian security forces. During the 90s, the Macedonian public saw the Albanians as a danger for their nation state and all activities undertaken by the Albanian political parties or civic organization in the state were seen as a temptation for the western part of Macedonia to secede (Pichler, 2009: 124).

POST-2001 HISTORIOGRAPHY AND HISTORY TEXTBOOKS

The conflict in 2001 was a culmination of interethnic tensions in the state in light of regional developments, especially the Kosovo war and rising Albanian nationalism in Kosovo and Macedonia. The Republic of Macedonia was no more an oasis of peace. The intervention of the international community prevented an escalation of the crisis into full-

scale civil war and gave the state-institutions an opportunity to create a more tolerant society. This was allowed by the signing of the Ohrid Framework Agreement (OFA) that put an end to the armed conflict and paved the way for a series of important constitutional changes granting more rights to the ethnic communities. However, in the following years, the OFA and the question of the relations between the two dominant ethnic groups have continued to be divisive factors in the state.

The interest of historians in the interethnic relations in the state remained low in the post-conflict period, while nationalistic rhetoric continued to dominate the historical narratives. In the late 2000s, a set of emerging works by amateur historians informed the image of Albanians, and the interethnic relations in the state, by presenting them as criminals who terrorized the Macedonians throughout history. Such a work is the pseudo-historiographical book with the title (in English translation): *Bloody Dossier: Arnaut Gego-Mirdit Brigand Terrorism in Macedonian Lands (1700 – 2002)*. As for the professional historians, several articles date from this period: one on the topic of education and the ethnic minorities (Albanians), which discusses the (ethnic Macedonian) authorities' intentions to introduce modern education reforms, while being opposed by more conservative and nationalistic groups in the first post-WWII decade (Ivanovski, 2010); and another dealing with the nationalist Albanian political organization before the Second World War (Malkovski, 2006). There are also works of historians dealing with Albanian history from a different perspective, which present facts about Albanian history and events important for the Albanian national idea that took place in Macedonia, such as the Bitola/Monastir Congress when the Albanian alphabet was adopted (Todoroska, 2008).

On the other side, there were narratives about the shared position of the ethnic Macedonians and the ethnic Albanians, as presented in the abovementioned example from the *History of the Macedonian People* concerning the Balkan wars. This interpretation was reaffirmed in a conference organized in 2013 by Macedonian

and Albanian historians, to commemorate a 1913 revolt against the Serbian authorities in what is today the southwestern part of North Macedonia (more in Gjorgiev, 2014). Another reference to the gradual change in the perspective of the place of Macedonians and Albanians is found in the naming of this revolt. While historians from the socialist period referred to it as the “Albanian revolt of 1913” (for instance: Stojanov, 1969: 193-199) historians participating in the conference used a new name, the “Ohrid-Debar September revolt of 1913”. This example seems to result from the need to improve a historiographical interpretation of the state’s interethnic relations; in this case at the expense of a third neighbour that plays the role of a common enemy—Serbia. However, interpretations offered for other historical periods do not represent the Albanians as brothers-in-arms and co-victims, but rather as inevitable enemies of the Macedonians.

With the creation of Albanian scientific institutions in 2008 and the official recognition of the Tetovo University in 2004, Albanian historians in the state increased their production and shaping of the historical narrative about the history of Albanians in the Balkans, particularly in Macedonia and to some extent in Kosovo. Speaking about methodology and the role history plays in contemporary Macedonian society, we note in their works historiographical battles over different issues similar to those seen in works by their Macedonian colleagues. A notable example is the case of the monastery St. Naum, located on the shores of the Ohrid lake near the border with Albania; Macedonian and Albanian historians are now leading the historiographical “battle” for the monastery and its history. Based on an imaginary geographic space of the region of Macedonia, Macedonian authors mainly focus on the historical events in the territory of this imagined geographical region. Consequently, all activities over the delimitation of the border are presented as part of the process of a division of an “ethno-geographic” Macedonia carried out by their neighbours. In this context, the region of Lake Ohrid is considered to be a Macedonian region in an ethno-national sense and the monastery is usually depicted as an integral part of Macedonia.

On the other side, the history of the monastery is also a focus of ethnic Albanian historians. During the last decade, the number of publications about the border delimitation between Albania and Yugoslavia has increased considerably. Such publications contain, for example, collections of documents from different archives on the status of the monastery and the delimitation of the border. Some Albanian historians are radical in their views, such as the Tetovo based historian Vebi Xhemaili, who openly speaks about the Albanian character of the monastery. He even asked for border changes in 2017 as he perceived the delimitation of the borderline in 1925 as an historical injustice for the ethnic Albanians. In this context, the interest of scholars in the history of the monastery has an equal importance for the question of the border (more in Todorov, 2021).

Although the OFA did not explicitly mention the question of the reform of history curricula, it still had important implications concerning textbooks and history education. At the same time, there was strong opposition from historians and politicians to discuss the 2001 conflict openly in history curricula. Despite this, the historians (a team of historians composed of six ethnic Macedonians, four Albanians and one Turk) agreed that history curricula needed reform and brought some changes compared to the ones from 1990s. However, those changes were more of a cosmetic nature, rather than real ones that could contribute to building a more tolerant society. To be precise, this time we note that more space is dedicated to the Albanian national history, thus turning the textbooks from ethnocentric Macedonian to bicentric Macedonian and Albanian textbooks. Another aim was to remove negative and pejorative terms about other ethnic groups, however this proceeded without much success, as will be discussed in the text below. Although the idea was to give more space to Albanian history and to improve the quality of education, these textbooks were first published in 2006—and they are currently in official use—still containing explanations that could create antagonisms between Macedonians and Albanians. Several examples in the textbooks for the seventh, eighth and ninth grades

show the negative implications history textbooks can have on the relations between the two ethnic groups.

With an extremely selective approach, the narrative in the textbook for the seventh grade depicts the Albanians as culturally inferior to their neighbours, including the Macedonians, while Macedonians are portrayed as the people that first came to the territory of Macedonia (Boškosi et al., 2009: 79-80). Another example that contributes to the formation of this negative image of the Albanians is the relativization of the pejorative term *Shiptar*, as was case in the textbooks from the 1990s (Boškosi et al., 2009: 126). On the other side, the Albanian ethnocentric narrative depicts the Ottomans or Turks in very negative terms in the context of the Albanian history. A second example, from the textbooks for the eighth grade, can be found in the section dedicated to the historical period from Ottoman history defined as “feudal anarchy”, a term long rejected by historians dealing with the history of the Ottoman Empire. In the section dedicated to the Albanian history, Ali Paša from Janina is depicted as someone who fought against the Ottomans, while in the Macedonian narrative he is defined as someone who caused difficulties to the “innocent” Macedonian population that ultimately led to a more difficult situation of the Macedonian people under Ottoman rule (Ačkoska et al., 2005: 8; 86-87; 90). Another example from the same textbook presents Albanians as people who opposed the reforms in the Ottoman Empire, although they intended to improve the situation in the Empire (Ačkoska et al., 2005: 114-115). The sections dedicated to Albanian history focus, as did the Macedonian sections, on the national struggle of Albanians and their fight against neighbouring nations who were trying to divide Albania – Bulgaria, Greece and Serbia. The third example comes from the textbook for the ninth grade dealing with the history of the 20th century. The Macedonians are presented here as victims of the quisling Albania that introduced policies against Macedonians (changing their names, hard taxation, etc.) and which by “terror forced the Macedonians to leave their homes”. More explicit messages can be found in the section dedicated

to the post-socialist period 1990-2002. Specifically, the percentage of the Albanian population in the Republic of Macedonia is explained as result of the high population growth and very high immigration of Albanians (Ristovski et al., 2011: 133). The Albanian narrative focuses on the difficult position of the Albanians in Yugoslavia (Kosovo), presenting the Serbs as their historical enemy.

At the end of the text, it should be mentioned that the textbooks contain nothing on the complex relationship between ethnic Macedonians and ethnic Albanians during the socialist period (1945–90) or afterwards, neither on their antagonism nor on their cultural and political conflicts. Such an approach would certainly help young generations to understand the roots of the conflicts and the current status of interethnic divisions. The Macedonian narrative in the textbook does not discuss the ethnicity-related problems in the country or the Albanian protests of 1968, 1981, 1989, 1992, 1994, and 1997. It is focused on the history of the ethnic Macedonians, the institutional development of the Socialist Republic of Macedonia, and the Macedonian minority in neighbouring countries (Bulgaria, Greece, and Albania). The Albanian ethno-national narrative ascribes exclusive culpability for the ethnic and economic problems in Kosovo and Yugoslavia to the Socialist Republic of Serbia (Ristovski et al., 2011: 121-122). There is no mention of the participation of Macedonian police forces in crushing demonstrations in Kosovo and Macedonia in 1968, 1981, and 1989, nor is any information provided on the discriminatory policies adopted by the Macedonian authorities toward the Albanian community in the country. Instead, the creation of the Socialist Republic of Macedonia and the status of the national minorities are presented in a markedly affirmative way; the textbook narrative asserts that all minorities in the Republic had the right to express their national identities freely. Further, the textbook claims that today, Albanians enjoy all national rights, and that “with the new [post-2001] constitution of the Republic of Macedonia, the rights of minorities are enlarged more than international standards prescribe” (Ristovski et al., 2011: 104; 134-135). This type of interpretation

suggests a situation in which ethnic Macedonians generously extend hospitality to ethnic Albanians, who effectively hold the status of guests in their own country.

Textbook analyses in Macedonia have also generated broad agreement among scholars that the books currently used in the Macedonian educational system take an ethnocentric approach, and that their narratives imply that the Albanians and Macedonians have consistently lived separately from one another. The message that these parallel narratives send to students is that national and cultural boundaries are very strong and immanent. There is nothing in these narratives about the common socio-political experience that the two communities have lived through in the past (Petroska-Beška, 2011). This reinforces a perception that history education, as one of the main mediums in the production of memory from Macedonia's socialist period to the present day, serves more to generate national sentiment, uphold state ideology, and reiterate political purposes than to develop skills of critical thinking and understanding of the past. The textbooks issued after the cessation of conflict neither discuss the armed conflict of 2001 nor pay adequate attention to the violent disintegration of Yugoslavia. They explain the reasons for the former country's breakup in a simplistic manner by defining it as a struggle between centralist and decentralist political groups. One could argue that the reticence apparent in Macedonia towards a discussion of the 2001-armed conflict and the conflict of the 1990s is not atypical of the ways in which conflicts are often avoided in textbooks. It took more than two decades, for instance, for Germany to commence an open discussion about World War II and the Holocaust. On the other side, in countries that have openly and immediately discussed their conflicts, such as in South Africa after the abolition of Apartheid, the establishment of so-called truth commissions to prosecute individual misconduct has often ended up tabooing the discussion of recent conflict in other contexts. In other cases, such as the former Yugoslav republics (Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, and Serbia), schools avoided a discussion of violent aspects of the past,

and discourse turned to other aspects of history, such as everyday life and cultural history (Stöber, 2013). In the Macedonian case, it is not only the recent conflict that is completely ignored: the history of violence and conflict between ethnic Macedonians/Orthodox Christians and Albanians/Muslims during the Ottoman period, the Balkan Wars, World War II, and other cultural or political conflicts is either omitted or is selectively included.

CONCLUSION

What we see in the examples presented in this chapter is that the two ethnocentric narratives of the Macedonians and Albanians living in North Macedonia create an image that the two communities are victims of history and of their neighbours. At the same time there is ignorance and a lack of will on the part of official institutions that deal with questions of education to openly discuss and teach young generations about the causes of conflicts and antagonisms between Macedonians and Albanians, i.e. to promote pedagogy for peace. Despite some shared elements from history, it is obvious that history and history textbooks also have the power to create divisions and enforce borders. The cohesive role is absent from history education. The contemporary understanding of history education—that it creates critical thinking, skills and a system of values by which the past could not be instrumentalized—is unknown; and historians still represent, and play an important part in, the instrumentalization of history for political purposes. Therefore, present Macedonian society represents a pre-conflict society. In addition, it was a pre-conflict society in the years when the Macedonian political elite claimed that the country was an oasis of peace in the turbulent Balkans. Today, in the context of the relations between North Macedonia and Bulgaria, one can easily hear how historians claim that history should be left to historians alone. It seems, however, that the instrumentalization of history comes from the historians too. Therefore, the question is: should we leave history only to the historians, and to which historians?

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THE MACEDONIAN MODEL OF NON-TERRITORIAL MULTICULTURAL ACCOMMODATION: NORMATIVE REFLECTIONS

Ana Čupeska

ABSTRACT

The Republic of North Macedonia's post-2001 model of dealing with cultural diversity places the state among the more liberal ones and not among the states which tend to homogenize their culturally diverse population. In other words, North Macedonia's institutions acknowledge the fact of societal multiculturalism and it is reified and materialized in a concrete political system. In this text, I discuss the normative multiculturalism of a non-territorial kind in North Macedonia as based upon three pillars: group-specific rights and guaranteed representation; power-sharing and consociation; as well as concrete interventions in the symbolic order.

All the three pillars in fact answer the question of why the normative solution proposed after the conflict functions in terms of the substantive democratic inclusiveness of minor communities within the political system, which indeed manifests via the norm that stimulates the need of everyday dialogue among the communities. Secondly, the pillars allow also for foundational power-sharing institutions without exhibiting any kind of territorial division, and with that the unity of the state is guaranteed (contrary to many examples of ethno-federalist power sharing arrangements). Thirdly, they allow a cultural autonomy for different cultural groups defined by the use of the unique mechanism of the reductive veto.

Keywords: *normative multiculturalism, non-territorial multicultural accommodation, North Macedonia, Ohrid Framework Agreement, political system.*

INTRODUCTION

It is a well-known fact, which the United Nations (UN) confirmed long ago, that there are approximately 8,000 different cultural groups across the globe. In addition, there are over 600 different language groups and more than 5,000 ethnic groups (more in Čupeska, 2017: 11). These data show that all the contemporary “nation-states” and societies are multi-ethnic or multi-cultural, and they are not homogeneous in terms of identity. Furthermore, “nation-states” are employing many and various ways of regulating cultural, ethnic, religious or linguistic diversities, which are related to the local and national histories of multiculturalism. These policies are being regularly questioned, discussed and negotiated: many ethnic and cultural groups across the globe are posing the questions of how to coexist with dominant groups, while state institutions seek solutions of managing inter-group relations and even de-escalating tensions and conflicts between various groups (for an overview, see Čupeska, 2013). The majority of those popular and political debates—especially in Europe after the First and the Second World Wars, as well as after many other violent escalations in the course of the last two centuries—informed the development of scientific discourses dedicated to identity, culture and cultural identity and, as such, those discourses become relevant interdependent variables for analysing political life, too. One of those concepts is the conflict of cultural identities, which I will be examining closely in this chapter, and indeed its normative resolutions. In particular, one aspect connected with the abovementioned instance—related to conflicts of cultural identities—is the feature that resolution can be treated as an open possibility, since cultural identities can be politically mobilized, although tensions over cultural values often prevail over structurally determined economic (and other) interests (Čupeska, 2013: 7). Most recently, we are witnessing paradigmatic shifts of the perceptions of the roles of identities in contemporary world politics which are primarily based upon the latest attempts at the reconceptualization of modern-day democracies. These reconceptualization attempts

stem from the social-constructivist assumptions that there are no “naturally” homogeneous states and societies: an argument which is usually complemented by the abovementioned data on the existence of various groups in the world. Critical changes, in that regard, are related to the different states’ approaches of adapting their political systems to their contextual societal multicultural realities. Simultaneously, however, one can also find many tendencies towards opposing these changes, and even attempts to homogenize culture and cultural identities via normative-exclusivist solutions, utilising radically republican politics.

The Republic of North Macedonia’s post-2001 model of dealing with cultural diversity places the state among the more liberal ones which tend to endorse the previously noted paradigmatic shift, and not among the states which tend to homogenize their culturally diverse population. In other words, North Macedonia’s institutions acknowledge the fact of societal multiculturalism and it is reified and materialized in a concrete political system. In particular, this model of non-territorial multicultural liberal accommodation is manifested in terms of valuable foundations built upon the debate of the so-called second-generation of liberal democratic responses to cultural diversity (which can be traced back to Rawls, Gray, Rorty, among others), but which also take into account the communitarian arguments of, for instance, Taylor and Macintyre, and of course incorporate insights from the thought of Kymlicka, Young and others.

Although the territory of Macedonia experienced episodes of violent escalation among the different ethnic, cultural and religious groups populating its lands in the past and the present, there are several key points in recent history which highlight the dominant ideas of a joint future and a shared statehood. One of the first was the establishment of the Kruševo Republic (*Kruševska republika*) in 1903. The short-lived Republic came after the Ilinden Uprising (*Ilindensko vostanie*) against the Ottoman authorities which started on 2 August 1903. The insurgents’ manifesto, known as the Kruševo Manifesto (*Kruševski manifest*), was actually a call for

solidarity among “the ordinary people” of various cultural, ethnic and religious denominations in the region—Macedonians, Arnauts (or Albanians), Turks and others—against the Ottoman Empire. In 1944, the Partisan anti-fascist struggle of the Macedonian fighters—including members of all these groups—resulted in the constituting of a provisional wartime government, purposefully done on the day of the Ilinden Uprising (Milosavlevski, 2004; Trajanovski, 2020), and the proclamation of “freedom and equality of all the nationalities in Macedonia” (see, for instance, Jančeva, 2014). The establishment of the Republic of Macedonia in 1991 was done in parallel with the adoption of the universalist concept of citizenship in the 1991 Macedonian Constitution (Chupeska, 2013).

Following the 2001 conflict, the 1991 Constitution was complemented by the multicultural model of citizenship promoted in the Ohrid Framework Agreement (OFA). This shift will be discussed in more detail below. Here, however, it is worth mentioning the stipulations put forward by the 2019 Greco-Macedonian Agreement, or the so-called Prespa Agreement. In the last few years, several other changes to the political system were introduced which allowed for an improvement of the power-sharing dynamics in the state: such are, for example, the establishment of the new institution of the First Vice-Prime Minister, whose first occupant was an ethnic Albanian; and the idea of shifting the Prime Minister’s office to an ethnic Albanian member of the government 100 days before the official end of the mandate (more in Zemon et al., 2021: 162).

Apart from the aforementioned episodes of the political adoption of the factual multicultural situation on the ground, one should distinguish its normative variant, too: the normative multicultural accommodation model which refers to the ways differing cultural group-identities are reflected on a normative and institutional level. This, for instance, is the main goal of preventing conflicts stemming from cultural differences and injustices (more on the difference between factual and normative multiculturalism in Čupeska and Rajčinovska Pandeva, 2022: 180). In this context, the normative

multiculturalism of a non-territorial kind in North Macedonia is based upon three pillars: group-specific rights and guaranteed representation; power-sharing and consociation; as well as concrete interventions in the symbolic order. As such, the model excludes any kind of territorial accommodative solutions as, for instance, ethno-federations, confederations etc. (for a more detailed comparison, see Čupeska, 2017).

THE BASIC PILLARS OF THE MACEDONIAN NON-TERRITORIAL MULTICULTURAL MODEL OF ACCOMMODATION

GUARANTEED REPRESENTATION

Cultural groups, especially ethnic minorities, often claim specific formats of guaranteed representation in state institutions and bodies related to political decision-making processes. Mechanisms of these types can vary, however. For example, three of the nine seats in the Canadian Supreme Court are reserved for Quebecer judges, while the Māori have guaranteed representation in the New Zealand parliament. The post-2001 Macedonian legal-political system, too, foresees guaranteed representation. Besides the constitutional proscriptions, the representation of ethnic communities in North Macedonia is realized via quotas for enrolments and elections, for instance, as well as the application of the so-called “Badinter principle” of double ethnic majority voting which enables guaranteed representation in voting in connection with, among others, the judges of the constitutional courts, the republican judicial council, and the national ombudsman.

However, one of the most recognizable elements of the Macedonian case was the Badinter principle as manifested through the sixth constitutional amendment from 2001, paragraph 2 of Article 8 of the Constitution of the Republic of Macedonia, which was supplemented to claim that one of the fundamental values is

the “adequate and fair representation of citizens who belong to all communities in the state bodies - government and other public institutions”, at all governmental levels. This implies guaranteed representation for the members of the communities, but also implies having greater participation, presence, and inclusion in the process of making political decisions. The tenth constitutional amendment from 2001 is also significant in this context, as it amends Article 69 of the 1991 Constitution with the following point: “The Assembly can take a decision if its meeting is attended by a majority of the total number of Representatives. The assembly makes decisions by a majority vote of the Representatives attending, but no less than one-third of the total number of Representatives, in so far as the Constitution does not provide for a qualified majority”. In a similar vein, the tenth constitutional amendment provides that

“[f]or laws that directly affect culture, use of language, education, personal documentation, and use of symbols, the Assembly makes decisions by a majority vote of the Representatives attending, within which there must be a majority of the votes of the Representatives attending who belong to communities not in the majority in the population of Macedonia. In the event of a dispute within the Assembly regarding the application of this provision, the Committee on Inter-Community Relations shall resolve the dispute”.

In addition, significant changes related to guaranteed representation have been introduced in the judiciary: the mandatory election of representatives from ethnic minorities is guaranteed by the Constitutional Court, the Republic’s Judicial Council and the Ombudsman. Specifically, the Assembly elects six judges to the Constitutional Court with a majority and the other three judges are elected with a double majority. In this way, ethnic minorities are guaranteed three seats among the constitutional judges. Similarly, in the Republic Judicial Council, three of the seven members must be chosen according to the Badinter principle. For the Ombudsman election also, the mandatory Badinter majority is required; and the

Ombudsman must dedicate special attention to the protection of the principles of non-discrimination, and to adequate and fair representation of community members in state government bodies, local self-government unit bodies, and in public institutions and services.

Guaranteed representation is also provided for the members of the state Inter-Community Relations Committee (ICRC) as well as in the election of members of the Security Council. Both institutions have adopted elements of power-sharing. Although the Security Council is nominally an advisory body headed by the state president, the participation of four governmental ministers in this body hints at its influence over the executive power. Similarly, the case with the ICRC shows the sensitivity of the Macedonian power-sharing elements. The body is responsible for the realization, creation and supervision of group-specific rights and, as such, will be discussed in more detail in the next section.

POWER-SHARING AND CONSOCIATION

Another form of non-territorial accommodation can be presented via consociational power-sharing arrangements. Consociational power-sharing can be understood horizontally (at legislative, executive and judicial level) and vertically (at local, central, regional, and even at the supranational level, as is the case, for example, with Northern Ireland). However, consociation does not refer to power-sharing only, but can also be associated with additional protective mechanisms, such as, for example, the veto. As per Lijphart and his theory of consociational power-sharing, there are two primary elements of consociation: power-sharing, which consists of the participation of the minor ethnic groups in the political decision-making processes; and group autonomy, especially in relation to education and culture. Additional mechanisms are proportionality and the so-called minority veto, but in practice, their usages are different and

related to national contexts. Apart from the fact that consociation is a form of multicultural accommodation, it is understood that it is also a mechanism for the institutional resolution of conflicts. The first and most basic mechanism for regulating conflict is the current power-sharing in the executive branch by the communities, while the representatives of the elites from the different communities are expected jointly to prevent conflict (more in Lijphart, 1969).

The consociational framework can be drawn up in a formal legal text, but it can also be found in the unwritten rules of political practice. Such is the case with the Macedonian post-electoral coalition in the executive power between the winning party in the so-called ethnic Macedonian block and the winning party in the ethnic Albanian block. Although consociation sometimes, but not always, has consequences for so-called ethno-federalism or plurality federalism, such as in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Belgium, Switzerland, Lebanon, Cyprus etc. (and this is, among other things, a reason for it being criticised), the Macedonian case serves to demonstrate exactly the opposite. Namely, it shows that consociation can take the form of a sophisticated and, above all, non-territorial accommodation (Čupeska, 2017: 143). Even though we could have observed this informal practice since 2002, it was the 2006 parliamentary elections and the post-electoral negotiations that led to the formation of a governing coalition between the winning party in the ethnic Macedonian political camp and the runner-up in the ethnic Albanian political camp. The negligence of the winner in the Albanian political camp led to a political crisis which was solved in May 2007, when the largest Albanian party, as per the 2006 elections, entered the governmental coalition.

The Macedonian accommodation model hence applies exclusively to non-territorial accommodation elements, which directly contributes to the state integration, unity, and the maintenance of its territorial integrity. Nevertheless, the most interesting and exclusively Macedonian instrument is the “reductive veto”, which is not a typical veto right even though very important to this institution,

because no parliamentary decision concerning non-majority communities can be passed without this “additional confirmation”. Hence, it can be said that the Badinter principle itself has a double character: firstly, it is the basis for guaranteed representation and for the exercise of some group-specific rights, and secondly, the principle itself represents an atypical veto right, and that, of course, belongs to consociationalism. This institute is very close to Northern Ireland’s parliamentary confirmation, which is sought by the majority of both unionists and nationalists. It is important to mention that, in the Macedonian context, the veto has not been abused. Namely, the empirical evidence from Macedonian history proves these fears of the integrativists, centripetalists and nationalists are wrong. On the other hand, it appeared that the ignorance of the need for inclusivity can actually paralyze political dynamism.

The guarantor of the power-sharing consociational accommodation, as mentioned above, is also related to the function of the ICRC. Before the establishment of this institution, there was a similar institution of the Council for Interethnic Relations. The critical difference between the old and the new institutions is the fact that the latter contributes to the accommodation of ethnic differences in a qualitatively different manner. The ICRC, which was founded by Parliament, is a power-sharing instrument at a legislative level, or a guarantor of the inclusion of the ethnic communities in North Macedonia. It has 19 members of whom seven are ethnic Macedonians and seven are ethnic Albanians, and one member per group from the Turkish, Vlach, Roma, Serb and Bosniak communities. Hence, the minor ethnic communities in the state have an actual majority in this parliamentary body. In addition, the twelfth constitutional amendment provides that if any of the communities does not have its own representatives in the Parliament, the Ombudsman, after consultation with the relevant representatives of those communities, will propose one of them.

The main function of the Committee, however, is to review issues related to relations between the ethnic communities and to make proposals for their resolution, and the Assembly is obliged to review

them and to make decisions about them. The committee decides, in the case of a dispute regarding the implementation of the voting procedures, according to the Badinter Principle, in the Assembly with the majority of votes of the members, whether implemented or not.

The Security Council, after the amendment to the Constitution in 2001, can also be considered as a form of consociational power-sharing. It is an organ in which the President of the country, the Prime Minister, and other ministers take part. Its work is related to security, defence and foreign affairs, but, three members of this body should reflect the composition of the population, and they are proposed by the President of the state. Although it seems to have an advisory role, the Council is a very important organ, given the fact that in societies with deep diversity, security is always a priority issue. This can be illustrated by its role before, during, and after the conflict in 2001, when the Security Council discussed proposals such as, for example, the declaration of a state of emergency.

ACCOMMODATIONS IN THE SYMBOLIC ORDER

The symbolic order, or the domain of public disposal of ethnic, cultural or religious symbols, even partially, received its normative guarantees via the constitutional amendments in 2001 and other legal interventions.

The inter-ethnic contest over the preamble of the Macedonian constitution dates back to the early 1990s and to the Albanian refusal to vote for a solution which does not recognize the community as constitutive (more in Dokmanovikj, 2021; Chupeska, 2013). The OFA intervened in the preamble with its fifth amendment, according to which:

“[t]he citizens of the Republic of Macedonia, the Macedonian people, as well as the citizens who live within its borders, which are part of the Albanian people, the Turkish people, the Vlach

people, the Serbian people, the Roma people, the Bosniak people and others taking responsibility for the present and the future of their homeland, aware of and grateful to their ancestors for the sacrifices and dedication in their efforts and struggle for the creation of an independent and sovereign state of Macedonia and responsible to future generations for the preservation and development of all that is valuable from the rich cultural heritage and coexistence in Macedonia, equal in their rights and obligations towards the common good - the Republic of Macedonia - in accordance with the traditions of the Republic of Kruševo and the decisions of ASNOM and the Referendum of September 8, 1991, decided to establish the Republic of Macedonia as an independent, sovereign state, with the intention of establishing and consolidating the rule of law, to guarantee human rights and civil liberties, to ensure peace and coexistence, social justice, economic well-being and progress in personal and communal life, through its representatives in the Assembly of the Republic of Macedonia, elected in free and democratic elections”.

The second important normative change to the symbolic order is related to the official languages, and in this sense, the fifth Amendment reads:

“The Macedonian language, written using its Cyrillic alphabet, is the official language throughout the Republic of Macedonia and in the international relations of the Republic of Macedonia. Any other language spoken by at least 20 percent of the population is also an official language, written using its alphabet, as specified below. Any official personal documents of citizens speaking an official language other than Macedonian shall also be issued in that language, in addition to the Macedonian language, in accordance with the law. Any person living in a unit of local self-government in which at least 20 percent of the population speaks an official language other than Macedonian may use that official language to communicate with the regional office of the central government with responsibility for that municipality; such an

office shall reply in that language in addition to Macedonian. Any person may use any official language to communicate with a main office of the central government, which shall reply in that language in addition to Macedonian. In the organs of the Republic of Macedonia, any official language other than Macedonian may be used in accordance with the law. In the units of local self-government where at least 20 percent of the population speaks a particular language, that language and its alphabet shall be used as an official language in addition to the Macedonian language and the Cyrillic alphabet. With respect to languages spoken by less than 20 percent of the population of a unit of local self-government, the local authorities shall decide on their use in public bodies”.

With this amendment, Article 7 of the Constitution of the Republic of Macedonia was replaced (Čupeska, 2021: 3-25). The latest legal solution dedicated to the use of languages derives its justification and basis from the OFA and Amendment 5 of the Constitution. This is exactly what happened with the adoption of the new so-called “Law on the Use of Languages” in 2019, which aims to enable genuine ethno-cultural justice: that is, a rightful interpretation of the already-established rights related to the OFA and especially to Amendment 5 of the Constitution.

The third intervention in the symbolic order refers to the recognition of religious communities, that is, they are recognized in addition to the Macedonian Orthodox Church and other religious communities. It is stated in Amendment 7 that:

“The Macedonian Orthodox Church, as well as the Islamic Religious Community in Macedonia, the Catholic Church, Evangelical Methodist Church, the Jewish Community and other Religious communities and groups are separate from the state and equal before the law. The Macedonian Orthodox Church, as well as the Islamic Religious Community in Macedonia, the Catholic Church, Evangelical Methodist Church, the Jewish

Community and other Religious communities and groups are free to establish schools and other social and charitable institutions, by way of a procedure regulated by law”.

Fourth, regarding freedom of expression and the preservation of communal cultural identities, as well as for enabling education in the native language, Amendment 8 was adopted, according to which:

“Members of communities have a right freely to express, foster and develop their identity and community attributes, and to use their community symbols. The Republic guarantees the protection of the ethnic, cultural, linguistic and religious identity of all communities. Members of communities have the right to establish institutions for culture, art, science and education, as well as scholarly and other associations for the expression, fostering and development of their identity. Members of communities have the right to instruction in their language in primary and secondary education, as determined by law. In schools where education is carried out in another language, the Macedonian language is also studied”.

Fifth, the state guarantees that it will promote and protect the cultural and historical heritage of the communities by adopting Amendment 9. It states that: “The Republic guarantees the protection, promotion and enhancement of the historical and artistic heritage of Macedonia and all communities in Macedonia and the treasures of which it is composed, regardless of their legal status”.

The changes in the symbolic order, in regard to multicultural accommodation, of course, were specified by different legal forms and by laws, hence, the most recognizable are those related to the use of symbols, flags, languages, education, holidays and so on.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The chapter discusses the non-territorial form of multicultural accommodation which was adopted in the Republic of Macedonia after the 2001 conflict and the OFA, as a form of upgrading the prior universalistic model of citizenship towards the multicultural and differential one. The introductory part of the article traces the historical episodes of interethnic collaboration which allowed for the establishment and the functioning of the post-2001 multicultural accommodation in the state. Even though there were some episodes of exhibiting political ethno-centrism via different actors and discursive tensions within socio-political life in that regard, the foundations of the contemporary Macedonian model can be read as a direct continuity from the state-funding episodes discussed above.

This work also maps the three basic pillars of the Macedonian model of non-territorial multicultural accommodation. Those are the guaranteed representation, the power-sharing and consociation arrangements, and the accommodation in the symbolic order.

All the three pillars in fact answer the question of why the normative solution proposed after the conflict functions in terms of the substantive democratic inclusiveness of minor communities within the political system, which indeed manifests via the norm that stimulates the need of everyday dialogue among the communities. Secondly, the pillars allow also for foundational power-sharing institutions without exhibiting any kind of territorial division, and with that the unity of the state is guaranteed (contrary to many examples of ethno-federalist power sharing arrangements). Thirdly, they allow a cultural autonomy for different cultural groups defined by the use of the unique mechanism of the reductive veto. This is within the scope of use referent to the Badinter principle in the legislative realm for which its consequence is reflected in securing a greater ethno-cultural justice. Fourthly, guaranteed representation and power-sharing mechanisms are applied at all governmental levels (horizontally and vertically) and as such are positive mechanisms

for institutional conflict resolution, and even for its prevention. Moreover, they are interesting in terms of weakening the ontological insecurity related to security dilemmas into which groups can often fail whenever there is significant diversity, and if the groups have had a history of violent conflict.

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INTERVIEW WITH BORO KITANOSKI

CAN YOU PLEASE LET US KNOW MORE ABOUT YOUR WORK AT PEACE ACTION (MIROVNA AKCIJA)?

Boro Kitanoski: Peace Action is primarily an activist organization that was established in 2001. We started working with dealing with the past issues somewhere around 2007-2008. We were primarily seeking ways how to constructively talk about some of the more gruelling topics from the past, about the past conflicts in particular, predominantly about 2001, but also about the history of recurrent conflict that burdens us. Back then it was still early days, but in the years that followed, such intersections of dialogue did occasionally occur in public, although they were usually taken up by actors who were in leading positions in 2001 or the period preceding it, largely some highly prominent military figures from one side or the other, or political figures, and that was it. We wanted to do some field work as well, so that people in the areas where the conflict took place could also start sharing among themselves. And that's how we came up with the idea of working on oral histories. I think that in Macedonia we were the first ones to start with it, but that is less important. Our idea was, through oral history interviews, to preserve some of the local memories. More precisely, our primary focus was the preservation of the memories of the people from the conflict regions; since the conflict was regionally based, primarily in the north-west parts of the country, although there were strong implications in some of the cities in the background, such as Prilep, Bitola, and even the cities from the east where people were mobilized from. We had a feeling that, first of all, they were certainly not given any spotlight in the public with their statements, but also that the experiences on the ground are quite similar regardless of the ethnic background.

We collected the histories, published books, and then went to visit those places to promote the books. At the promotions, we invited the narrators to speak, and we hoped that at those events the neighbours would be able to hear each other or at least be curious enough to come and learn what the others wrote through some form of simulated dialogue and be able to hear what it felt for the other side “to go through the war”. And we did this for quite some time, the archive now consists of probably somewhere around 250 to 300 interviews and is continuously increasing. In addition, we prepared a training program on peace-building and studying the past. We conduct it at least once a year, and when the funding allows it, sometimes even twice. It is a training program that has now been named “10 Days of Peace Republic” and has been held in Kruševo in recent years. So far, we have 13 basic trainings and a 10-day program where various topics of peace-building issues are addressed which include several days of work on past events. I mention this program because we are very proud of it, it has produced many activists who got to hear and learn about those topics there for the first time. Very often young people come and say something very basic, like—I have never met an Albanian person in my life. This is the reality in Macedonia, that the people who live in ethnically mixed environments are not at all aware of—they have never met, so they are interested to know more, or they have never talked about these topics with people from the “other side”, so they want to find out. In addition to that program, we have been trying, in similar methodological ways, to engage people in a dialogue about these topics over the years. Sometimes it’s military veterans, displaced persons, young people of various profiles. Through a controlled safe process, away from the public eye, these topics can be addressed in a constructive way in safe meetings behind closed doors. This program has a regional component, we work a lot with Kosovo and with organizations from Serbia, Bosnia, as well as organizations from Croatia. Over the past years, we have been present at regional projects that deal with events from the past. Now we have a current training similar to this one with a focus on the events of the past, a very similar program to the “10 Days of Peace

Republic”. Another program that we are working on is “Support to integrated education in schools”. Though it we worked on a training and mentoring of teachers in order to create activities on inter-ethnic integration in education.

CAN YOU SHARE WITH US MORE ABOUT YOUR ORAL HISTORIES PROGRAM?

WHAT IS THE SPATIAL DISTRIBUTION OF THE INTERVIEWS AND THE PROCESS OF INTERVIEWING?

Kitanoski: We were an organization established in Prilep, and we’ve had activists from Skopje, later on from Tetovo as well, so that we are not based solely in one city. We are present elsewhere all the time, including Bitola. When we started working on oral histories, we were aware that despite our moderate coverage of different towns, we could not reach the field, nor could we get to the stories, because it was a very controversial topic; it was difficult to reach the people which is not that typical of Macedonia, but it is a typical of large organizations, many people came as donors after the war, many organizations approached these people, but then the projects ended, and the organizations left. This led to mistrust among the people, they felt they had been taken advantage of— “What did we get out of this, the project ended, and we’ve been left with nothing”. We were lucky because with the support of the German Ministry of Development we were able to stay on the topic long-term and we made a team of people, from those places, and their instructions were to collect life stories from their vicinities, both geographically and ethnically, but primarily geographically, from their own environment. It often happened that we would get a fantastic story, someone would open up, and after a few days they would call us and say—“I don’t feel comfortable with what I said, I would like to revoke it”. And we would withdraw it. And then we would go on to do a second recording and the second one would be washed out and pale, but what was always more important for us was to keep on working with the people and to have the people stay involved in the process. We are not journalists, we are not going after an exclusive story, it was important to us to

preserve the life stories on the one hand, so that they would remain as a historical source, i.e. to safeguard the people's memories, but above all to have people who will be involved in the process. The activities we had were complementary. When it comes to the team of field researchers or collectors of stories, very often the people who came to our training were mobilized, so they were interested in the topic. Thus, we would include them in the team, they would go through special training on oral history and then proceed to collect stories from their own environment. That's how we got to know various veterans.

And, regarding the reception, all kinds of situations happened, some could be very emotional, all kinds of things happened. I'm trying to remember, it's been a long time since we've had an oral history book launch. All sorts of things happened. Some people who met each other through this process remained friends. And those are people from different profiles, former fighters from one side and from the other, who later collaborated in various forms. Some of them are friends to this day, and this is how we met quite a few of our colleagues, especially the younger ones among us. We had no academic experience, nor did we have any reference to learn from. We were literally looking for a method to achieve dialogue and we are activists. Some of us worked in the region, some of us conducted seminars, and we set out to learn by doing. We learned along the way. We were lucky, a historian from Latvia, Laura Lauberga, who was a volunteer at the Prilep Museum, if I remember well, she didn't like how things were set up at the Museum, and she heard about us, so she decided to volunteer with us. Her specialty was oral history and she trained us. She stayed with us for a year and a half and the first training we got were from her. This was around 2008.

CAN YOU TELL US MORE ABOUT THE WORK WITH MILITARY VETERANS AND DISPLACED PERSONS?

Kitanoski: Military veterans bring strong credibility to their community. Our job with them was to make them aware of that responsibility. When

someone speaks from that position—"I have fought, I was a former fighter"—their word holds a lot of weight. They are sometimes not aware, and our job was to make them aware of the responsibility they bear on these topics.

With regard to displaced persons, the situation in Macedonia is such that the status of internally displaced persons has been ethnically determined since the time of the war. Macedonians and Serbs got the status, and Albanians rarely asked, and even when they did, we know cases when they were not granted this status. And that is the dynamic of the conflict. It further generated unequal treatment. And the bad perception is that we have a high return of internally displaced persons, of refugees, I think it's 94 percent. However, if you look at the proportion of those who stayed and were unable to return, through an ethnical lens, they are overwhelmingly Macedonians and Serbs. And the access is difficult, primarily for those who failed to return, because they went to battle with the state, first they were granted some compensations, but then they lost in court, they had to be sent back and that garnered a lot of distrust. They were the most difficult to work with, in my experience, because they had been double-crossed so many times by various actors from the state, the government, primarily by the state and their mistrust is overwhelming. We have stayed in contact with a few that we have had closer cooperation with as activists, but many years have passed, around 20 years have passed, now they are the second generation, and the experiences are completely different.

Regarding the veterans, they were often attempts, from both the Macedonian and the Albanian sides, for their instrumentalization as party members. In other words, there was a clash between the Macedonian parties as to who would attract the Macedonian veterans, while on the Albanian side, they primarily sided with DUI, but some other organizations also appeared there in the meantime. And many of them were exploited in the party altercations, which put a lot of strain on the memory work. My point, here, is that although we all speak in theory about dealing with the past, as if we work

after a conflict that is finished, in practice and in our country, we have this conflict stirring all the time. We have practically worked in conflict or with new outbursts of conflict, which all have their roots back in ethnic conflicts. And when the political situation is unstable, various actors know how to take advantage of it, and this leads to major stirs. Just when we've made one step forward with a certain group, a political crisis happens that takes us five steps back. And the veterans, they are left to their own devices, their organizations, some of them have put up a good fight to maintain their independence, to be authentic to the foreign organizations, because they were pushed into party conflicts all the time. Be it recruitment during elections, who is with whom, who belongs to which party, and this internal dynamic continues to exist among them, even within a single ethnicity. My feeling is that a good number of them are those who bear the identity of a military veteran, because many of them do not, even though they took part on the conflict. They've simply moved on with their lives, but those who are active in the organizations are ready for a dialogue, very open to dialogue, but the issues related to the veteran status are the most important to them. And we, as peace activists, have never seen a place for ourselves in these issues. We seek space for dialogue, in the context of peace-building.

WHAT IS YOUR TAKE ON THE MEMORY CULTURE IN PRILEP?

Kitanoski: We attend the commemoration at Karpalak, at the invitation primarily of the local military veterans who want to include us. Otherwise, the city authorities organized these commemorative events, changing street names, and placing monuments. I do not know who was consulted during the construction of the monuments at the time when they were built. What I can generally give as a comment, is that various monuments have been made during the past years: some are very figurative, and some have problematic inscriptions. And I am talking about the entire territory of Macedonia, not only the city of Prilep. The ones that were set up in Prilep are quite neutral, abstract, in terms of their appearance, which may be a good thing.

This is a general problem on the entire territory of former Yugoslavia. If we look at the monuments that were erected on the topic of the Second World War, they are all abstract figures. There are some monumental edifices, large complexes that were built, but they were part and are the outcome of the political situation in the country in the 70s, 80s, a return to idea of Yugoslavism, but what they do have in common is that they were made with a certain distance from the war. The problem with the more recent monuments is that they started building them right away, when the situation was still too heated. Some were made in the spur of the post-war excitement, and some were erected in a village, so it is not even known who initiated them, or who paid for them, they were simply built immediately after. Macedonia was not bypassed by this danger. I am making a comparison between the monuments built after the wars in former Yugoslavia, in Bosnia for instance, they started too early and in some places, they were not well thought out, neither the messages nor the overall look.

CAN YOU PLEASE SHARE MORE DETAILS ABOUT THE LAST EXHIBITION DEDICATED TO THE CIVILIAN VICTIMS WHICH YOUR ORGANIZATION CO-ORGANIZED?

Kitanoski: The exhibition “Site naši solzi/Gjithë lotët tanë” (*All our tears*) is a collaboration between organizations from Macedonia, Serbia, Kosovo, the Netherlands, and the USA. It consists of photographs of the families of the civilian victims and the displaced persons from the wars in Macedonia, Serbia, and Kosovo, from today’s perspective. The concept was made by the partner-organizations: four photographers were included in the process who took photos for this occasion. The opening in Belgrade was on 25 May, in Skopje we had an opening on 12 October, and it will be set up in Prishtina in November 2023. The purpose of the exhibition is to inform and remind about the civilian victims of the wars whose memory is predominantly left on the margins of our societies. It has been 20 or 25 years since these wars, so we want to remind the public not only about the destinies of these people but also of their stories and the way they are being interpreted today.

In Belgrade, the opening was as part of the “Mirëdita/Dobar Dan” Festival. The opening ceremony in Skopje was fantastic. As per usual, there was very little media interest in these topics about dealing with the past, however, Mala Stanica was full to the brim, it could not even accommodate all the people who came. The President Stevo Pendarovski accepted to speak at the opening, and representatives of the victims’ families spoke as well. Abedin Zymberi, although a military veteran, spoke as a representative of the Zymberi family, other people also had their addresses: we also had a young activist speaking, and we were very interested to hear her because this is a topic that is not covered in the curriculum, they don’t learn about this in school. Hence, it was very interesting for us to hear how those stories are interpreted today from the perspective of a young person, and what messages from these conflicts reach young people nowadays. It was an emotional encounter for a lot of people. Those of us who work in this field are aware of how emotional such events can be. For many visitors who met for the first time, it was a very emotional experience to read the stories, although we tried to contain the narrative in the photos themselves. By paying all due respect to the victims, we wanted to present the facts in a way that would not be emotionally draining, because, after all, we are dealing with horrible destinies. We just wanted to remind the people there about the civilian victims and their families, and the displaced persons that 20 years, or 25 years after the war, are still here.

INTERVIEW WITH ELENA B. STAVREVSKA

CAN YOU PLEASE LET US KNOW MORE ABOUT YOUR FIELD OF EXPERTISE?

Elena B. Stavrevska: I am a scholar in the area of peace studies, a feminist, an assistant professor of international relations at the University of Bristol and part of the YugoslaWomen+ Collective. My focus is primarily on issues related to intersectionality, political economy and transitional justice in societies that have experienced conflict. So far, most of my research has focused on Bosnia and Herzegovina and Colombia, but I have covered some issues and experiences from Macedonia as well.

COULD YOU TELL US SOMETHING MORE ABOUT YOUR WORK IN BIH AND COLOMBIA?

Stavrevska: During my doctoral studies, I focused on the agency of people who are not by default considered to be part of the three constituent peoples defined by the Dayton Peace Agreement, and by extension, by the Constitution of BiH as well. This notion may include the people from other ethnic groups, but it can often be extended to cover the women who are considered part of the constituent peoples as well. Or to put it more broadly, I explored the experiences at the intersections of people's gender, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status in a system that only recognizes certain experiences and affiliations. Colombia, on the other hand, represents an almost diametrically opposite case to that of Bosnia and Herzegovina, where the peace agreement itself recognizes these so-called intersectional identities and experiences of violence that happened during the conflict. I am working on a book that makes a connection between these two countries and highlights the things we can learn from these two cases of practices of transitional justice.

CAN YOU SHARE MORE DETAILS ABOUT YOUR RESEARCH IN MACEDONIA?

Stavrevska: Up until the research on the situation and needs of the victims of the wars in Serbia, Kosovo and Macedonia, under the title “Dealing with the Past, Surviving the Present”, which was conducted together with Peace Action as part of the project “Strengthening Inclusive Victim Voices, Transforming Narratives”, I had not specifically researched the process of transitional justice in Macedonia. What I had previously done research on in relation to the armed conflict in our country was at the level of the Ohrid Framework Agreement, as well as a comparison of the peace agreements by studying the international community approach starting with the Dayton Peace Agreement, through the Ohrid Peace Agreement, and on to the Ahtisaari Plan. These three occurrences of armed conflicts and war differed from each other indeed, but what is also evident is the development of the way of thinking, primarily of the international community across the three documents. This is particularly striking in terms of their understanding of the different groups within a society which had been differently affected by the military actions and understanding the need to address more than just the political rights. In fact, there is a lot to be learned by comparing, not only these three documents, but also the approach to coming to terms with the past in the three countries.

The research with Peace Action that was already mentioned, focused on the voices, needs and views of the victims of the armed conflict in 2001. In our country, unlike the other countries in the region, there are virtually no victims’ associations. This, in turn, raises the question: how could it be possible to hear the voices of victims unless there are victims’ associations, and if the government is not even aware, let alone interested, in who the victims were and how they were affected? When we were mapping out the people that we needed to talk to in Macedonia, we were guided by a broad socio-legal definition of civilian victims that includes not only the victims who experienced physical violence, but people affected in a broader

sense of the word. We included 50 people from different categories and regions, including: internally displaced persons and their families, refugees, families of civilian victims, families of military victims, veterans and representatives of veteran associations, both from among the state security forces and the NLA, as well as people from the regions affected by the conflict. This last category included people from smaller ethnic communities, because these communities in those places were often forced to choose whose side they would be on during the conflict, and sometimes in the aftermath as well; then history teachers (both men and women), as important actors in the process of dealing with the past, and young people and peace activists. We sought, on the one hand, to understand what the needs were, and on the other hand, what could be done based on those needs, because a large part of the needs are actually similar, regardless of the geographical position, that is, the location of the people, and regardless of their status.

HOW DO YOU ASSESS THE PROCESS OF TALKING AND WORKING WITH THE VICTIMS OF THE CONFLICT?

Stavrevska: In addition to the previously mentioned needs, none of the people affected by the armed conflict, regardless of whether they had been actively involved or not, had ever received psychological help. And many of them, especially those who had been displaced, as well as all the other people affected by the conflict, have what one of the people I interviewed called “Unresolved grief”. In some cases, it is the grief of fleeing one’s home, that hardly anyone has processed, and it is very difficult to talk about it. I focused on the present, however, and through the present point of view, they often freely tell what they feel comfortable telling from their own experience, from the conflict. I do not know whether talking about some of these experiences gets easier over time. Maybe. In our country, it is still too soon after the armed conflict. If you do not talk about some things, over time, memories get distorted and some of the things are forgotten. Of course, it is impossible to forget the trauma, but some of the other details may fade out.

We also tried to understand whether and to what extent the needs of the different categories of people we talked to and the overall situation, were determined by gender. And of course, they were. First, in Macedonia, the discussion about 2001, when it does occur, although, as I already mentioned those are very rare occasions, is informed by a dominant hyper masculinity. This has to do with the fact that veterans are the only ones who are visible in the public discourse and most of the people who talk about 2001 at all are men. This, among other things, determines how we perceive the victims, who can be a victim, who has the right to speak about the victims, etc. Until the end of the court proceedings, there was also the “Zora” (*Dawn*) Association of internally displaced persons from Aračinovo, which was led by a woman, who was a rare female presence in the public discourse in the context of 2001. But this association no longer exists. On top of this, the state has done absolutely nothing to understand whether and how the armed conflict affected people differently. Not to mention that not providing psychological help to veterans also has gendered consequences in terms of how they deal with their trauma, and what is considered socially to be “acceptable for a man”, the gender dynamics in the family, etc. And there are also gendered consequences for women from conflict-affected regions, because the space where they can express their grief is closed, usually limited only to the home. On top of the patriarchy that prevails, on top of the trauma from the conflict, there is an even more rigid (traditional) understanding (of gender roles), usually in rural areas, which shrinks the spaces of who can grieve and where a person can grieve, which is quite different for men and women. In addition to this, in Macedonia, to this day, we have no information as to whether there had been any sexual violence during the conflict. It is mentioned that there might have been such cases, but it is not something that is discussed at all. So the conflict itself and everything related to that conflict is very strictly gender-determined, which leaves little room for an inclusive understanding of who is a victim and what a victim is allowed to/may do. In the long run this is very harmful for the entire society.

HOW DO YOU EVALUATE THE SITUATION WITH THE MEMORIES OF THE CONFLICT IN POST-CONFLICT MACEDONIA?

Stavrevska: In Macedonia, with the implementation of the Ohrid Framework Agreement, the 2001 conflict and its causes and consequences are relayed in the public discourse as a closed chapter in the country's history, although the implementation was not followed-up by official efforts to determine the facts, to confront the past, or to implement transitional justice. Partially related to this, the armed conflict is almost completely invisible to the public, it is not taught in schools, it is not talked about in the media, it is not discussed by the political elites... In a way, what we are facing is some kind of social oblivion of the conflict. This is different from some of the countries in the region where there is even active denial that some of the events happened at all. But it is important to understand in context that as a result of this oblivion, the experiences and needs of the different categories of people affected by the conflict are also subject to social oblivion and it is exactly this tendency that the new study counters.

In the country there are two clearly demarcated dominant narratives regarding 2001, which are not only fundamentally different, but they also temporally cover different periods of time. Although it is only normal that there would be differences between the perceptions of the ethnic groups, in general, the dominant narrative among ethnic Albanians is built based on the experiences, violence and discrimination during the Yugoslav period, the period after the Declaration of Independence and the period of armed conflict. The dominant narrative among ethnic Macedonians regarding the conflict, however, is generally tied to the period of the war in Kosovo and then the period of the armed conflict in Macedonia in 2001. Related to this, and probably unsurprisingly, there are also two different narratives regarding the Ohrid Framework Agreement and the constitutional, legal and institutional changes that came as a result of the Agreement. Of course, it is also unsurprising that the parties in power in the last

20 years have not helped to build an understanding between the two narratives, let alone reach a common understanding of the conflict and its consequences. On the contrary, quite frequently some of the political parties precisely play the card of exacerbating the differences between the narratives and making the opposing views of the two ethnic communities even more rigid, thus contributing to the impossibility of rapprochement and jointly dealing the past.

HOW DO YOU INTERPRET THE INITIATIVE TO COMMEMORATE THE CIVILIAN VICTIMS FROM 2017?

Stavrevska: It might have been the only outreach initiative in recent years that was widely visible. As part of the abovementioned research, I interviewed both Stojanche Angelov and Abedin Zymberi. They have different stories as to why the initiative did not continue, but the story of how it started is the same: in that they became close as colleagues at work, even though they had heard about each other from before. It is important to mention that they both bear huge respect for each other and for the type of military opponents they had been and how they adhered to a certain code and military ethics. For example, there was no abuse of people under the command of either of them. And I think that is important in their case, the component of trust which is where the initiative actually stemmed from is an important one. Furthermore, the purpose of the initiative was to learn from the experiences from 2001, and in some way to contribute towards dealing with the past.

On a slightly more general note, and not directly related to this initiative, veterans are being forgotten by both sides and some of the veterans that I spoke to pointed out that if the only way to have their sacrifice recognized is to help the veterans on both sides, then they would accept it. This is certainly a huge shift in the narrative compared to what it was in 2001, after more than two decades of unresolved veteran issues. This is the reason why I think that in Macedonia it is interesting that veterans can take this very positive role, especially

in the absence of victims' organizations, victims' associations, where veterans are perhaps the only ones who keep the discourse of 2001 alive in the public space. If it were not for those discussions in which people like Zymberi and Angelov participate from time to time, or the initiatives on dealing with the past by a handful of non-governmental organizations such as Peace Action, 2001 would come up a lot less in conversations. However, I would like to point out that it is of critical importance for us to find a way to open space for not only veterans, but to also recognise that there are other categories of people who had been suffering and are still suffering in different ways.

HOW DO YOU PERCEIVE THE POTENTIAL OF COMMEMORATIVE EVENTS?

Stavrevska: Commemorations may serve as very powerful tool of understanding the past and reconciliation. Even the commemorations of the Ohrid Framework Agreement, unless they are completely dominated by political parties, may be a way to show the human face of the conflict and what the end of those hostilities meant. It can become an important space for discussion that recognizes that 2001 is not a finished story, that just because we have had a so-called "successful peace process" it does not mean that all the chapters have been closed, it does not mean that we should not talk about what happened, how it happened and that we should not determine the facts surrounding the events from 2001. Furthermore, there is a lot of room for work on different levels. One level is what we have been doing with Peace Action now, that is, mapping the victims; followed up by perhaps organizing and bringing the victims together, advocating to address their needs and recognition of those experiences. Some of these activities require hard work and funding, but others also require political capital, especially the part on recognizing the experiences and addressing the needs. Another area the study also points to is working with history teachers, as well as the Ministry of Education, to ensure that learning about our history does not end with the 90s. Let's start integrating some of the events that happened later, find a way to learn about history not separately, but

jointly, and find a way to start talking about differences through the educational process without having to fit them into a single picture. To recognize that it might be fine to have two narratives, because the experiences from all those decades are different. We cannot change history, but we can change how we move forward, and finding a way for the two narratives to coexist is one of those ways. In addition, it is necessary to do further research on the period before, during, and after the armed conflict. There is very little material about 2001 in our country, not only academically, but also in terms of publications that are more widely available. Such publications, which can serve as the basis for certain discussions that would raise certain questions, are truly necessary for us. It seems to me that maybe we are a bit reluctant to sit in the discomfort that comes from dealing the past or from being ignorant about the things that happened, by confronting the facts that contradict our experience and memory. However, we should not be intimidated by those discussions, they are a part of our past and the only way to build a common future is by raising these issues.

INTERVIEW WITH VLORA RECHICA

CAN YOU PLEASE SHARE YOUR EXPERIENCE WITH INTERVIEWING THE WITNESSES OF 2001?

Vlora Rechica: We did the interviews back in 2017 in cooperation with forumZFD. They financed the research, and we worked together with Darko Leitner-Stojanov and Jana Kocevka. I did the interviews in Albanian, and Jana and Darko conducted the interviews in Macedonian. The goal was to do the interviews in the native language, and the interviewer had to be fluent in the native language of the respondents, so that the respondents could feel a little more comfortable in the things they were telling us. We managed to have interviews in the same village with both Albanians and Macedonians, and it was quite interesting to see the different experiences of the people from the same place. Of course, we went to the Western part of Macedonia, we also went to Skopje and in the villages around Skopje, because the conflict was the most intense there and we focused mainly on civilians who were affected in some way, that is, who were victims of the conflict itself. It was interesting to me as a researcher because that is when I encountered the term “oral history” for the first time. Prior to 2017, I did not even know that this data collection method existed, but of course after I spent several weeks of trainings with the experts from forumZFD, they explained the method to us and I learned how I need to treat the people I interview, how I need to make them feel comfortable, because we were covering sensitive topics. And what helped me the most was that I also read a very similar study from Kosovo about victims of gender-based violence and sexual violence during the war in 1998-99. Indeed, what I read, those experiences were certainly more traumatic, considering the war and the conflict there, but trauma is something that cannot be measured, trauma is terrifying for any of its victims.

CAN YOU PLEASE SHARE MORE ABOUT THE PROCESS OF FINDING INFORMANTS?

Rechica: That was the most interesting part of the research. What I did was go to the villages that were most affected by the conflict, right in the centre of the village, whether it was a mosque or another place where people regularly gathered, a cafe or some other place, and I literally talked straight to the people—“can you please tell me who I can interview and who would be willing to share some information?”—because when it comes to oral history it is also important for the respondents to be willing to share their story with you. And thus we were able to find profiles of people that were illustrative enough to get us to understand the conflict and to grasp that impact that the conflict had had on the lives of the ordinary people, the people who were not policymakers at the time, the people who were not leaders in the political parties.

WHICH STORY DO YOU REMEMBER THE BEST?

Rechica: For me, even today, one of the stories that affected me the most is the story of a mother who lost her child in the bombing of Ljuboten. According to the news, they expected that there would be peace, the Ohrid Framework Agreement was about to be signed on 13 August. And the shelling and the action in Ljuboten took place on 11 August. This happened at a time when the people were expecting the situation to calm down, they were easing up a little bit and they were not ready for that turn of events. Moreover, the child was very young, 6 years old, so it was a very difficult interview to conduct, and the interviewers definitely need more training, because they might face stories that are terribly difficult. That story served as inspiration for another study I undertook. The new study will come out at the end of December, and it is something that I have also been working on this year. It does not deal with oral history, but rather transitional justice and I focused on exactly this case from Ljuboten. We are also preparing a short documentary inspired by this story with forumZFD.

Through this second research, I realized that one of the most important facts is that the process of reconciliation in our country is expected to occur spontaneously over time, there is no activity on the part of the institutions to bring people together, but also there is no action for transitional justice. We are talking about the fact that nearly all the civilians who were affected by the conflict have not received any compensation, they have not received justice, they have not even been granted the right to speak their truth in some way. There have been some minor actions, but none of them was even close to a social change, no policy has been created that would affect everyone and which would constitute a comprehensive approach to address these problems, especially not to forget the pardons that were granted in 2011, which left many people without any closure and deprived of justice, without the ability to speak their truth.

CAN YOU PLEASE TELL US MORE ABOUT THE DOCUMENTARY FILM THAT YOU MENTIONED AND THE RESEARCH BEHIND IT?

Rechica: As for the plot, the idea for the documentary came from a girl who had read the book and was inspired by this story. Of all the stories she had read from the 2001 conflict, this story stood out to her because she felt that the voice of women in the 2001 conflict was not sufficiently heard and was given very little space which can be seen in the book on oral history itself. We really struggled to find women who had some kind of an experience and who wanted to share it. So that was also the goal: to show 2001 through the voice of a woman, and that is the voice of the mother whose child was killed in 2001 in the shelling of Ljuboten. That's literally the point of the documentary. Let's tell a story through a female voice. The voiceover narrating the story will be female, it will be animated, it will not be filmed, but there will be a voice and there will be a story nonetheless. We also did additional interviews this year with the child's mother, to get the additional information we needed to fill in the gaps. We're working with a screenwriter and a storyteller because we are researchers, and we need someone who knows how to properly portray it. The entire

documentary team consists of women. I worked in the research department. I wrote a study on transitional justice, focusing on this case and the fact that when the trials went to The Hague and Tarčulovski and Ljube Boškovski were tried, what happened was that out of all the cases that were presented there, the case of Erxhan Aliu, the child who was murdered, was not taken into consideration. The family has not received any justice for the case, they have only received some minor assistance from international organizations, from the packages that they took to Ljuboten in 2001. I am not sure which the international humanitarian organizations were, including the Red Cross, but they haven't received any substantial help. Donor help only. These are the people who have given them some money to repair their house, because their house was destroyed during the shelling of the village, but they have not received any essential structural aid from the state or from any other international humanitarian organization. The most important thing is that they have not even received psychological help, as is the case with most of the victims since 2001, regardless of whether the victims were civilians or part of the paramilitary forces. Some of them have received some counselling from a psychologist, but others have not, including this child's mother. And those residues from that traumatic experience can be noticed even today in the interviews we did. That's how we got the inspiration for both the study and the documentary.

WAS THERE ANY DIFFERENCE IN THE PROCESSES OF INTERVIEWING IN SKOPJE AND THE SKOPJE REGION AND TETOVO AND THE TETOVO REGION?

Rechica: From the interviews we conducted, I did not manage to perceive any substantial differences, because I think when you talk to individuals, their experience is subjective, which is only natural. When they were telling their stories, they told them with sincerity and with all the sadness they carry within, and I could not see a difference between one and the other. I think that's literally what makes us human. The same can be observed between the Macedonian and Albanian interviews. That was the most important finding for us in a

way, that there was no difference in the people's personal experiences. Everyone suffers in a situation like that, you cannot say that some suffered more and someone suffered less. And as for the differences between women and men, women focus more on emotions, on empathy in the way they talk about things, they focus more and tell us about how they felt in the moments when those things happened to them. In contrast, men focus more on the surrounding events. Who made the decision, what happened and how it happened, whereas the women talk more about how they felt. I have seen this in other research I've done with focus groups or interviews, not just with the oral history ones. Women are more open to talk about their feelings.

IN WHAT WAYS CAN ORAL HISTORIES CONTRIBUTE TO THE PUBLIC DISCOURSE WITH REGARDS TO 2001?

Rechica: As for oral histories, yes, they make a difference, because as researchers we are always focused on empirically proving something and saying something, but I think oral history has another purpose, a much more important purpose, which is for people to be able to tell their story and that story needs to remain somewhere, be archived, so that someone can read it and so that it can serve as a source indicating something really happened. And sometimes subjectivity is very important for research, it is not always objectivity that's important. There are many ways to be objective, there are many other methods that we can use in those types of research. But I think that we can also afford to have a research method that is as subjective as oral history. Later on, of course, sociologists and anthropologists, ethnologists will decide, my perspective as a political scientist is this, that we must hold space for people's stories, validate the experiences of the people who were affected by conflict, by wars and by traumatic experiences.

From the research that I have now done, one part of my research was this, to see if both the Albanian and Macedonian families have received any help, psychological, financial, or whether there had

been any endeavours aimed at reconciliation. What can be seen from all these 20 years is that there was a little help from a few civil organizations that tried to do something. These initiatives were short-term, they would initiate a process of reconciliation, they would do an event or two, they would publish an oral history book and that would be the end of it. And I think from the oral interviews that I did both in 2017 and again this year, I understood that people didn't get any structural help that would be ongoing for years, that would leave a trace, and that they would know that they could rely on. It is not that it's wrong for us to have events like these, or that it is wrong to have this research, but something has to be done with these families who have gone through an experience like this. The most important in all of this is that there was no justice for so many of them. We are talking about one case that had a resolution, the case of Ljuboten, but there are other cases too. And not even all cases from Ljuboten received justice for what happened to them, including the case with the child. While other cases—the Mavrovo workers, up to Lipkovo—have not received any court resolution and these are people who have gone through a really traumatic experience. Our courts and our parties decided to come to an agreement and do as they saw fit at that moment. They granted pardons to all the people who were involved in the conflict. And in the end, it was the casualties who got a short end of the stick in this entire story, because the casualties were the ones who did not get any justice from all these cases.

CAN YOU PLEASE PROVIDE YOUR TAKE ON TODAY'S, POST-CONFLICT SITUATION IN THE STATE?

Rechica: I think that from all the other research that I have conducted, it is very easy to conclude that the biggest problem is the political culture and the way our political parties function. Just like the pardoning was a political agreement, which amnestied the DUI affiliates, or amnestied the VMRO-DPMNE affiliates or whoever was in power when that pardoning was granted. They pardon their own people and that same line of thinking continues to this day. We

are still talking about our people and your people. Political parties function through clientelism and operate through party bots. The most important thing for them is that their people are settled. And yes, their people were settled because it can be seen that both the people from DUI and the people from VMRO-DPMNE who were involved in the conflict went on to be involved in politics and had political benefits from that process. We are talking about Lika, we are talking about Tarčulovski, who returned from prison and became an MP and ran for a mayor. Boškovski too, he continued his political career after 2001, as well as the others who were involved in the NLA, because their people saw to them being granted benefits. This party-belonging philosophy has not changed to this day, because political parties only care about sorting their political problems, and not doing something that is useful to society. And this was evident even through the interviews, during the interviews the respondents said yes, the parties took care of their own, but they didn't give us anything. There is a feeling of injustice among people. Political parties make their own policies, be it in the Parliament or in the Government. That's my point of view. That is the societal problem. A partisan society that has not been able to overcome this flaw. We are not a society of active citizens, unfortunately.

AND WHAT IS THE GENERAL UNDERSTANDING OF THE 2001 CONFLICT IN THIS CONTEXT?

Rechica: There are parallel understandings of the conflict, that is indisputable. They exist, because those parallel narratives were created by the politicians in society after the conflict. Because that's our way of thinking, not only between the ethnic communities, but also within the ethnic communities. In particular, this can now be seen in the Macedonian ethnic community with the singing of the Agreements with Greece and with Bulgaria. You have the "real Macedonians" and you have the "traitors". And those narratives are mainly to the benefit of the political parties because this way they can sell a nationalist narrative without a substantial governance program more easily.

Moreover, these narratives have certainly become embedded in the people's way of thinking. DUI took great advantage of that narrative among the Albanian community, with the territorial distribution taking place in 2004, and then the officialization of the Albanian language. But they did not present the officialization of the Albanian language as an initiative giving rights to an ethnic group, the narrative they used was that it was a victory for the Albanians. And when political parties create those narratives, they have an impact. You can't say they have no influence. It could be felt back in 2017 when we did the interviews, and it can be felt now too. But what is becoming increasingly evident in the research I am doing, is that these political narratives have begun to create aversion among the public towards the political parties and the people seek a third narrative that would be different. When it comes to 2001, of course there will be different narratives, because people always tend to feel like they were the victim, sometimes they feel that they were right, the Macedonians feel that they were attacked by the Albanians, the Albanians feel that they had the right to rebel because they were discriminated against, and when it comes to whether there was a political moment to take advantage of these feelings, yes there was, from both sides, of course. This can be seen through an analysis of what was published in the Macedonian and Albanian media during that period. It is an individual subjective experience, that is what I can say as to why there are different attitudes towards the conflict, and of course this opinion is influenced by those social narratives, that is, by the creators of those narratives, and unfortunately the creators of those narratives in our country are the political parties and politicians.

One good thing that happened was the last exhibition by Peace Action, but I think it is a "bubble" that we have created the civil sector. There were people from the Macedonian, Albanian and Serbian communities, because it was a regional project and there was this atmosphere indicating that people understand that they have to move forward together. There can no longer be narratives that are divisive. But it's a cluster, it's a "bubble" of people in which certain civil society organizations, certain people live, and the saddest thing for me at such

events is that I meet many people who I know have said things to me in private that they don't agree with, whereas at events like these, I see how they sell the story of reconciliation, and in privacy there are people who still believe in those divisive narratives. So it is impossible to get out of that trap of superficiality.

INTERVIEW WITH ARBNORA MEMETI

CAN YOU PLEASE SHARE MORE ABOUT YOUR EXPERIENCES IN RESEARCHING THE 2001 CONFLICT?

Arbnora Memeti: I participated in such a project through FES for the first time, that was the research of the commemorations of 2001. It was a very interesting research, especially regarding the methodology and in terms of data collection. I, personally, predominantly worked with the resources at the National and University Library in Skopje. The most interesting part of my research was the reading of the statements and interviews with the political party leaders, because I came across a lot of interesting things that I could compare with some present-day aspects, especially in terms of the rights of Albanians and the like. On the other hand, since I am also a media worker, I found it to be very interesting to see who and how the media reported on during that period, and I really got loads of information and insight. Subsequently, I continued to collaborate with other organizations on similar projects. My initial incentive was the project with FES, because it was a great experience that left a lasting impression, so later on I joined other activities offered to me by other organisations as well.

More specifically, regarding the collection of data and materials, I can say that my part was mainly related to the Albanian language newspapers and the commemorative events organized by Albanian actors and organizations. It has to be mentioned that there is a problem with the archives of Albanian newspapers, because either pages of the newspapers are missing, or entire issues have not been archived. I also tried to embed information from other sources about some of the dates that were missing in the archives, mainly through conversations with journalists and media workers who worked in

those newsrooms. On the other hand, it should also be observed that some newspapers did not report on those occurrences and events at all.

CAN YOU LET US KNOW MORE ABOUT YOUR COOPERATION WITH OTHER ORGANIZATIONS REGARDING 2001?

Memeti: After I finished the work on the FES project, I received an offer from Peace Action. I worked with them on an exhibition about the conflict in 2001, a project very similar to the project I had worked on before. I found it to be a life-changing experience, and I came to realize that we, both as media workers and as citizens, are not discussing the civilian victims, their families or the displaced persons at all, where they are, what they are doing, what they are faced with today. And when I first received an offer from them—since this was a regional project with Kosovo, Serbia and Macedonia—I realized that they had hired two photographers from Macedonia and that one of them had to be Macedonian and the other photographer had to be Albanian. I was honestly surprised, why should there be two of us when more than 20 years had passed since the war, and we, as a society, overcame many of those tensions. I honestly was not aware that people might not accept me as an Albanian photojournalist when I went to photograph them, or that my Macedonian colleague wouldn't be accepted by the Albanian population when trying to take pictures of them. And that was the first moment when we started working on the field, in exact locations, sites of significance for both sides, that we went out to and photographed.

For example, I was in Tetovo to photograph a Roma person who used to live in a neighborhood in Tetovo and I realized that the man was not feeling comfortable around me because according to him the NLA was a terrorist organization, but he did not want to say it in front of me. I felt terrible because he didn't feel comfortable enough to say what he really thought because I was the one taking pictures of him. We even had situations where people did not accept being

photographed and did not want to be featured in the photos, despite the fact that we told them that they should feel free and express whatever they faced during the war. By the way, I photographed the man from Tetovo from the back, because he did not want to be shown from the front.

Another issue that I was also not aware of is when we went to a Kumanovo village, where there's this church that was built in the 16th century, which the Orthodox believers cannot attend because they have been driven away from the village by the Albanians and cannot go there to celebrate the Orthodox holiday of the church, because they are not allowed to. I had no idea that something like that ever happened, and it was the first time I was faced with such a situation. I was at the scene, I went to the church to see it, it is a very old church in the mountains, and I saw that it was vandalized by the Albanians and it is being vandalized every year. Then I realized that we live in the same time period, but we don't live in the same reality. I had no idea about these things before, before taking part in these projects, that the people there still had such major problems. And it was the first time I faced it.

Another thing that I was especially glad about, was that for the first time at our exhibition, a member of the Zymberi family came as our guest and participated in the opening of the exhibition, in addition to the President of the state. The Zymberi family member's message was very strong to all the people who attended the exhibition, making a strong plea against armed conflicts and issuing a clear never again message. Because he, despite the fact that he participated in the war and he was armed, he said that only war profiteers come out as winners from wars, while everyone else is a loser.

In Belgrade, during the opening of the exhibition, there was a woman from an organization that deals with victims from the Serbian side who were in the Kosovo war. It is an accomplishment when people from all sides can be gathered in one place, which was our goal. A photographer from Serbia also worked on that exhibition,

and his focus was on the families from Kosovska Mitrovica, Kosovo, who were banished from their homes and who now live elsewhere in Serbia. On the other hand, there was also a photographer who worked with the families of the victims in Kosovo. Nakje Batev and I also worked with the victims and the families of the victims from Macedonia.

AS A MEDIA WORKER, HOW WOULD YOU ASSESS THE WORK OF THE MEDIA OUTLETS IN RELATION TO INTER-ETHNIC RELATIONS AND 2001?

Memeti: I believe that we have newsrooms that are full of prejudices that they still have not managed to get rid of. They pretend they know better, but they do not really, and their behaviour speaks volumes about what they think of both sides. There is not just one side here, but two sides. It is enough to open the media from the year when the massacre in Ljuboten took place, but also on the same date throughout the years. Not a single Macedonian-language media outlet reports on the event. And that's tragic for us as a society, because we kind of want to put our head in the sand about something that happened in our society, and we refuse to come to terms with it. I always say that we all have something to say about 2001, but the problem is that we try to avoid the topic, suppress it and treat it as a taboo. We treat it as a time bomb that can go off at any given moment, and therefore it is better to just keep our mouths shut and not talk about the conflict. It has to do with media literacy and the role of media in society, because we need media that can educate our people that something happened to us indeed, and that it should never happen again, and that we shouldn't keep our mouth shut and never mention it. I had a situation just recently when, as a participant of the "Peace Republic", I realized that some of the other participants did not even know about the event that had taken place in Ljuboten. They were confused when I talked about it because they had never heard of it happening. And that's when I realized what the problem is. The problem is in the media, because they refuse to cover those events and by doing so they pardon the atrocities committed over

the Albanians, and on the other hand, we, as media in the Albanian language, pardon the events and the atrocities suffered by all the victims of the conflict in 2001. And I think we need journalists who are not prejudiced, who are free, to go out and report from both sides. Once we start talking about the conflict, once we face it, I think that from that moment onwards we would not have any more problems like the ones we have today.

FINALLY, CAN YOU PLEASE SHARE YOUR INSIGHTS ON THE PROCESS OF PHOTOGRAPHING THE FAMILIES OF THE CIVILIAN VICTIMS AND THE DISPLACED PERSONS?

Memeti: I previously had no idea that someone might not accept me as an Albanian photojournalist, not want me to take their photo. I had one such case in Tetovo and another one in “Partenie Zografski” with a girl who was banished from Aračinovo with her family. They never returned to Aračinovo. We went to photograph her together with my colleague. We tried to go everywhere together, but I noticed that people were bothered, or didn’t feel comfortable telling their story, sharing what happened to them during the war. The man from Tetovo did not feel free enough to share that in his opinion the NLA was a terrorist organization and that he was harassed by them. He didn’t say anything at all, and I was feeling sad because I was the reason why this man would not open up to tell his story. I should have known where I was going to work, I should have known about the man, but I did not, they only told me about this later. When I started photographing and interviewing him, he began avoiding me and did not open up about his experience during the conflict. I finally gave up and realized that it is really hard to work with victims or people who are enduring trauma from the past. Sending a Macedonian photographer is not the solution to this, we must also go on field assignments like these and ensure mutual freedom, so that the people can tell me how they feel, and not feel intimidated when I interview them. That is why I believe we need a professional, trauma-informed approach, in order to be able to make those people feel comfortable and share their stories more easily.

TRANSITIONAL JUSTICE AND ARENAS OF MEMORY: THREE CASES FROM THE THREE POST-YUGOSLAV COUNTRIES

Ana Ljubojevic

ABSTRACT

This paper deals with the impact of transitional justice mechanisms on politics of memory in post-Yugoslav countries. The developments of both narratives are compared through three case studies: 1) Croatian media landscape about Vukovar, held at the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia, 2) Peace March from Nežuk to Potočari in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and 3) Serbian parliamentary declaration on Srebrenica.

This diverse set of data was used in order to understand strategies of dealing with the past from the perspective of transitional justice and remembrance activities. Main actors and their agency are discussed, as well as their impact on collective identity and societal understanding of the past. More precisely, this chapter analyses the impact of transitional justice on both official commemorations and grassroots memory initiatives in Southeast Europe. In particular, I do so by comparing narratives stemming from two different foci: transitional justice and its judicial mechanisms on one, and mnemonic actions as the other. How is it then possible to understand and overcome past conflicts or troubled historical legacies? What is meant by “collective memory” and how does such remembering figure in making identity in the present? What moral choices are involved in representing past events as “ours” and not “theirs”?

In order to shed light upon, and search for answers to, such complex questions, this paper will first give a short theoretical overview of the nexus between transitional justice and politics of memory. Second, it will provide

some examples of top-down and bottom-up mnemonic practices and their direct interaction with narratives established by judicial mechanisms of transitional justice. The case study selection does not aim to include a comprehensive list of all the major initiatives, but rather to explain trends and developments of memorial culture(s) in post-Yugoslav countries. Finally, a short conclusion based on empirical evidence is presented.

Keywords: *transitional justice, politics of memory, Vukovar, the International Crime Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia,*

INTRODUCTION

One of the most difficult questions to be answered by a country that has gone through a transition from authoritarianism or armed conflict to a democracy based on the rule of the law is how society shall deal with the atrocities and injustices of the past. Both legal and political developments of measures concerning human rights are facilitated by mechanisms of transitional justice, ranging from institutional reforms of promoting human rights, to the political and societal promotion of such norms. On the other hand, politics of memory and formation of collective memory describe a societal response to a difficult past, the way something is remembered or forgotten, and how specific sites acquire emotional and political importance.

This chapter analyses the impact of transitional justice on both official commemorations and grassroots memory initiatives in Southeast Europe. In particular, I do so by comparing narratives stemming from two different foci: transitional justice and its judicial mechanisms on one, and mnemonic actions as the other. How is it then possible to understand and overcome past conflicts or troubled historical legacies? What is meant by “collective memory” and how does such remembering figure in making identity in the present? What moral choices are involved in representing past events as “ours” and not “theirs”?

In order to shed light upon, and search for answers to, such complex questions, this paper will first give a short theoretical overview of the nexus between transitional justice and politics of memory. Second, it will provide some examples of top-down and bottom-up mnemonic practices and their direct interaction with narratives established by judicial mechanisms of transitional justice. The case study selection does not aim to include a comprehensive list of all the major initiatives, but rather to explain trends and developments of memorial culture(s) in post-Yugoslav countries. Finally, a short conclusion based on empirical evidence is presented.

TRANSITIONAL JUSTICE AND COLLECTIVE MEMORY

In the 2004 UN report “The Rule of Law in Conflict and Post-Conflict Societies”, transitional justice is defined as “the full range of processes and mechanisms associated with a society’s attempts to come to terms with a legacy of large-scale past abuses, in order to ensure accountability, serve justice and achieve reconciliation”.¹ Transitional justice may include both judicial and non-judicial mechanisms, with differing levels of international involvement (or none at all) and individual prosecutions. Its mechanisms consist of criminal justice-oriented policies such as trials for war crimes. Transitional justice mechanisms are also addressed to institutional reform (vetting and lustration), reparations, and truth-telling (truth commissions).

In all the successor countries of the former Yugoslavia so far, apart from the rare attempts of truth commissions and lustration, the focus of transitional justice has been on the prosecution of war crimes. Such a choice was backed by the thesis on reconciliatory and educational roles of courts, underlying the individualization of guilt (Akhavan, 1998), “decoupling ethnicity from the crimes” (MacDonald, 2009) and contribution to the public making of memory (Osiel, 2000).

1 Available at: <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N04/395/29/PDF/N0439529.pdf?OpenElement>

However, war crime trials generate partial narratives as they deal only with historical facts directly connected to establishing the question of individual guilt (Wilson, 2005). Moreover, judicial representations of past events are fragmented and require processes of selection and interpretation in order to be transformed into a public narrative.

Collective memory, on the other hand, refers to the selective and cumulative process through which collectives, from groups to nations, make use of—and meaningful sense of—the past. The politics of memory (Barahona de Brito, 2010) and the construction of *cultural* and *public memory* are central themes of memory studies. Cultural memory is memory that creates a community, according to Jan Assmann, and it usually rests on different forms of relations to the past, whereas public memory emerges from the intersection of official and vernacular cultural expressions. Both cultural and public memory analyse the different processes of remembrance and forgetting that occur at the individual, group, and societal level. Research in this field has rapidly developed through an interdisciplinary approach over the last twenty years, building upon such diverse bodies of scholarship as history, cultural studies, literature, linguistics, psychology, cognitive sciences, ethnology, and political science. The interaction between cognitive (individual) and social (collective) memory (Halbwachs, 1992) is established and manifested symbolically through a “body of reusable texts, images, and rituals specific to each society in each epoch, whose ‘cultivation’ serves to stabilize and convey that society’s self-image” (Assmann and Czaplicka, 1995). Through these media and related ritual practices, the stories and myths that congeal as collective memory should serve as a foundation upon which collective identity rests.

Commemorative practices, especially those in place where war crimes occurred, act as a nexus between transitional justice and collective memory. In such circumstances, the narrative about the past created during trials (as in the case of transitional justice in the post-Yugoslav countries) is translated and compared in commemorative speeches, either as a means to reinforce the

proposed narrative, or as a thesis to contradict it. Therefore, the judicial truth is confronted with either official politics of memory or the memory of a specific community, or both.

TRANSITIONAL JUSTICE MECHANISMS RELATED TO THE COUNTRIES ORIGINATING FROM THE FORMER YUGOSLAVIA

The International Crime Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) was the first international tribunal since the International Military Tribunals established in Nuremberg and Tokyo in the aftermath of the Second World War. The ICTY was established by United Nations Security Council resolution 827, which was passed on 25 May 1993 in the face of the serious violations of international humanitarian law committed in the territory of the former Yugoslavia since 1991.² The tribunal was set up in accordance with Chapter VII of the UN Charter, defining action with respect to threats to peace, breaches of the peace, and acts of aggression. The only possible way of creating an *ad hoc* tribunal was through political means which greatly influenced the perception and reception of the tribunal in the situation countries.³

The UN Security Council Resolution 827 of 1993 also met the criticism of one part of the international community, which saw it as a fig leaf seeking to cover inadequate intervention during the wars in Croatia and Bosnia.⁴ The difficulties the ICTY faced at the beginning of its mandate, such as the delay before the start of the first trial and the lack of authority imposed on the countries of the former Yugoslavia, were also at sharp odds with the achievements and its ongoing functioning.

2 Full text of UNSC Resolution 827: <http://daccessdds.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N93/306/28/IMG/N9330628.pdf?OpenElement>.

3 United Nations. Chapter VII. Accessed on 9 May 2017. Available at: <http://www.un.org/en/sections/un-charter/chapter-vii/>.

4 For an overview of criticism for non-intervention during the 1990s wars in the former Yugoslavia, see: Bass, 2000.

Despite the success and development of international humanitarian law as a discipline, this paper focuses instead on the modalities of translating and informing the general public about the judicial mechanism of transitional justice.

The process of collective identity negotiation is staged in various arenas of memory such as history, political and official discourse, commemorations or popular culture. In post-Yugoslav countries, transitional justice played and plays an important role in each mnemonic event/situation. The analytical part of the paper takes examples from such a diverse body of evidence, in order to assess the role of transitional justice mechanisms in collective memory processes. The following cases are examined: the official commemoration of the fall of Vukovar; the grassroots initiative Srebrenica Peace March; and the Serbian Parliament's Declaration on Srebrenica.

ARENAS OF MEMORY

I) VUKOVAR; THE CASE BEFORE THE ICTY

The town of Vukovar, situated in the very eastern part of Croatia, underwent some of the worst destruction during the Homeland War (*Domovinski rat*).⁵ In 1991, the town was under siege for three months and was subject to constant shelling led by the Yugoslav People's Army (YPA), members of the Territorial Defence (TD), and various paramilitary units from Serbia.

On 7 November 1995 the ICTY issued an initial indictment against three former YPA high officers for the crimes committed at the Ovčara farm, near Vukovar. The indictment against Mrkšić, Radić and Šljivančanin described events dating from the beginning of the siege

⁵The name Homeland War carries a strong link with the struggle for the independence that Croatia obtained during the war, but also implies the defensive nature of the conflict, led in order to safeguard the homeland. The Homeland War narrative has two main identity elements: it depicts the country as a proud victim of senseless Serbian aggression, and as a hero who subsequently won the war.

of Vukovar in late August 1991, to the fall of the city to Serb forces, the subsequent forced removal of about four hundred non-Serbs from the Vukovar hospital, and the killing of at least 264 Croats and other non-Serbs at the Ovčara farm on 20 November 1991.⁶

On 27 September 2007 the ICTY convicted Mrkšić to twenty years of imprisonment, Šljivančanin to five, while Radić was acquitted of all charges. In 2009 the Appeals judgment was finalized, confirming the sentence for Mrkšić and increasing Šljivančanin's sentence from five to seventeen years of imprisonment. On 11 May Šljivančanin's defense council filed a request for a revision of the Appeals judgment. Šljivančanin was sentenced to ten years imprisonment on 8 December 2010, after an extraordinary re-examination of the Appeals judgment. At the beginning of July 2011, after serving more than two thirds of the sentence, he was released and returned to Belgrade.

POLITICAL DISCOURSE AND COMMEMORATIONS

Up until 1998, when the United Nations Transitional Administration for Eastern Slavonia, Baranja and Western Sirmium (UNTAES) finished its mandate and Croatia regained its current territory and borders, the commemoration of the fall of Vukovar was held outside of the town, in Zagreb, Đakovo or Osijek. Most of the political speeches given either by the local government in exile or political elites at the national level, focused on the exiled population (*prognanici*) and offered hope and promises for an eventual return to Vukovar.

The siege and battle for Vukovar were described in such a way that Vukovar almost seemed like a sacrificial victim, whereas the symbolical value of Vukovar for the official historical narrative was often underlined: "Vukovar was a test for Croatian history" without which "there would not be a contemporary Croatia".⁷ The military

6 The initial indictment was confirmed on 7 November 1995, was later amended to include Slavko Dokmanović, mayor of wartime Vukovar. Following the death of the fourth indictree, the indictment was changed three more times and was finalised on 15 November 2004.

7 Statement of the general Bobetko, in *Večernji list*, "Vukovar se vraća kući", 19.11.1994.

loss was also presented as a moral victory where “the town was lost, but Croatia was gained;”⁸ in a “miraculous ninety days resistance of Croatian defenders against much more powerful enemy”.⁹ Finally, Vukovar was placed outside of the local and national context as a “warning to the world, the same one which, if only it had recognized Greater Serbia’s aspirations, it could have saved many lives in Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina”.¹⁰

The ICTY issued the indictment against the “Vukovar three” even before the signing of the Dayton Agreement which ended the wars in the former Yugoslavia, but it was only in 2003 that Šljivančanin was arrested and the trial itself begun in October 2005. Such a long process backed the already negative public attitude towards the ICTY and reinforced the narrative which existed before the indictment.¹¹ Moreover, even though the indictment mentioned the context of the war in Vukovar, the process was set up to prove individual guilt in only one episode (although the bloodiest) of the attacks on Vukovar: the Ovčara massacre. Political discourse about 18 November 1991 underlined this as “the day when the international system of humanitarian law broke down”,¹² when the local population was left to “Serbian criminals” (ibid), when “Serbia was defeated, Europe died and Croatia rose from the ashes”.¹³ Also, “the fall of Vukovar”, as 18 November was initially labelled, gave space to an ever more frequent “Day of Remembrance”, in order to avoid direct reminiscence of the

8 Statement of Branko Borković - Mladi Jastreb in *Vjesnik*, “Nema Hrvatske bez Vukovara”, 19.11.1994.

9 Statement of mayor of Vukovar Jure Kolak, in Ivica Đikić, *Slobodna Dalmacija*, “Živimo za povratak!”, 19.11.1995.

10 Jadranka Kosor, envoy of the President Tuđman, in Ivica Đikić, *Slobodna Dalmacija*, “Živimo za povratak!”, 19.11.1995.

11 See for example surveys accessible online at: <http://www.bgcentar.org/rs/bgcentar/eng-lat/citizens-perceptions-of-human-rights-lawand-practice/stavovi-prema-ratnim-zlocinima-haskom-tribunalu-domacem-pravosu-za-ratne-zlocine/>.

12 Statement of Mladi Jastreb, in *Slobodna Dalmacija*, “Vukovar se diže iz pepela”, 19.11.1998.

13 Statement of the Vukovar mayor Štengl in *Vjesnik*, “Godišnjica pada Vukovara - kad će zločinci pred sud?”, 19.1.1999.

defeat and to provide a more heroic and victorious version of the event. Furthermore, unlike the ICTY which never entered into debate to characterize the nature of the war in Croatia, Croatian politicians warned of people “who want to transform Greater Serbian aggression into civil war in which every side would be equal”.¹⁴ In addition, not only direct perpetrators and mid-rank officials are considered to be guilty,¹⁵ but also “the Yugoslav Army General Staff and political regime need to face trials”.¹⁶

Less than two months after the ICTY’s trial judgements in the *Vukovar hospital* case, the fall of the town was commemorated under the slogan “To Vukovar for truth and justice”, alluding to the perception that the justice delivered at The Hague tribunal was not satisfactory. Indeed, the Croatian Parliament issued a *Declaration on Judgment of the ICTY for war crimes on “Ovčara” and on cooperation of the Republic of Croatia with the ICTY*.¹⁷ The Parliament reacted, calling the judgment “unacceptable” and “unsustainable from a legal and moral aspect” (ibid). Although the facts proven before the ICTY were not denied, many expressed their disapproval and “particular discomfort because of the shameful decision”¹⁸ urging that “Croatia must do everything so that Croatian courts judge and punish all those responsible for horrendous crimes in Vukovar”,¹⁹ “despite any possible allegations of interfering in the functioning of The ICTY”.²⁰ The framing of the war in Vukovar did not change much because of the ICTY judgment: it continued to outline the elements kept outside

14 Statement of the Vice-President of the Parliament Zdravko Tomac, in *Slobodna Dalmacija*, “Svijeće za tisuće stradalih”, 19.11.2000.

15 Presumption of innocence until the outcome of the judgment was never mentioned.

16 Statement of Presedent Mesić, in *Vjesnik*, “Mesić, Račan i Tomčić položili vijence u Vukovaru”, 18.11.2001.

17 For the full text of the declaration, see: <http://www.propisi.hr/print.php?id=7219>.

18 Statement of the mayor of Vukovar Željka Buljan, in Butigan, S., *Jutarnji list*, “Slogan: u Vukovar za istinu i pravdu”, 7.11.2007.

19 Statement of Vladimir Šeks, speaker of the Parliament 2007.

20 Statement of Jadranka Kosor, Prime Minister 2007.

of the judicial process, such as the nature of the war and the meaning of the battle for the future of the Croatian state.

The symbolic importance of victimhood for the narrative of Vukovar gained another dimension with the completion of the ICTY trials: not only was Vukovar recognised as the victim of YPA attacks, but also of selective international justice “from which, in this part of the world, so much was expected”,²¹ but which “was not at the height of expectations” (ibid). However, “Vukovar held the enemy for eighty-seven days [...] and made the aggressor lose its power, meaning that the rest of Croatia could have been defended”, and thus secured a central place in the Croatian historical narrative.²²

II) SREBRENICA

Wide-spread killings in the Bosnian town of Srebrenica stand as a symbol of the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina: “Its name has become synonymous with what is considered the worst atrocity in Europe after 1945” (Duijzings 2007, 141). Srebrenica, thus, “has come to represent the key through which the wars of the 1990s are understood” (Gordy 2013). A commemoration for the victims of Srebrenica has taken place in Potočari Memorial Center on 11 July each year since 2002, when the first such memorial event took place.

Twelve cases have dealt with the Srebrenica massacre before the ICTY; it is by a large margin the most complex crime tried before The Hague tribunal. Furthermore, Srebrenica is the only crime committed during the wars of the 1990s for which there are convictions for genocide. The first ICTY judgment proving that the massacre in Srebrenica was an act of genocide, i.e. the *Krstić* case, represented a breakthrough in both the development of international humanitarian law and in terms of political impact: it established “beyond any reasonable doubt that a crime of genocide

21 Statement of the President Mesić, in S. Butigan, *Slobodna Dalmacija*, “Dan sjećanja”, 18.11.2009.

22 Statement of Luka Bebić, former Speaker of the Parliament, in *Vjesnik*, “U Vukovaru je obranjena Hrvatska”, 19.11.2009.

was committed in Srebrenica”²³ against “a part of the Bosnian Muslim people as a national, ethnical, or religious group” (ibid). The ICTY trial chambers stated as cause that the attacks were motivated by the goal of creating a continuity of contiguous Serbian territory, because of Srebrenica’s proximity to the Serbian border. The ICTY clearly did not want to downplay the severity of the crime and rejected the voices trying to depict men in Srebrenica as soldiers of the Army of Bosnia and Herzegovina (ARBiH). Instead the tribunal stated that people from Srebrenica “whether members of the 28th Division [of ARBiH] or not, [...] decided to flee through the woods towards Tuzla” (ibid). The judgment furthermore described the location of the mass executions, but also recalled the denial of the genocide and of Bosniak victims by the Serbian sides. Specifically, the Trial judgment underlined that in front of Pilica Dom, one of the mass execution sites, a memorial “in honour of the ... Serbian heroes who died for the Serbian cause” (ibid) was erected after the war in what is now the present Republika Srpska entity. On the other hand, there is not a single memorial plaque marking the location where almost 600 civilians were killed in a matter of days in July 1995.

Thus, the main aim of the *Peace march* can be seen as a *protest* against the denial of the crime of genocide, and as an implicit call “for [the] faster arrest and prosecution of [the] persons responsible for [the] crimes committed”.²⁴ Listed on the official list of the genocide commemoration events, the *Peace march* pays respect to the victims of the Srebrenica genocide and recalls the heinous crimes committed by the army and police forces of Republika Srpska.

Taking place every year since 2005, this walking procession starts on 8 July in the village of Nezuk in order to arrive, three days later, at Potočari Memorial Center, some 100 km away. The itinerary, whose official slogan is “to freedom via route of death” (*trasom smrti do*

23 ICTY press release, *Radislav Krstić becomes the First Person to be Convicted of Genocide at the ICTY and is Sentenced to 46 Years Imprisonment*, 2/8/2001, The Hague, <http://www.icty.org/sid/7964> (Accessed on 15/3/2020).

24 Information retrieved from the official website: www.marsmira.org/bs/marsmira.php# (Accessed August 28, 2020).

slobode), follows the reverse journey of the so-called *Death march* from Srebrenica to liberated territories near Tuzla. Nowadays, the *Peace march* is led by a group of survivors of the escape journey that around 15,000 Bosniaks embarked on after fleeing the Srebrenica safe area in July 1995 in order to reach territories under the command of the Army of BiH.²⁵ Organized by a group of advocates, survivors, and relatives of the genocide victims, each year it attracts more than 5,000 participants from Bosnia and Herzegovina and abroad. The logistics of the march are impressive: these range from trucks providing transport of heavy bags and backpacks, to army personnel mounting tents and sanitation stations; from media representatives recording and reporting live, to medical services along the way; and last but not least, to the countless volunteers providing vouchers to registered participants, food, and information. In addition, so-called history lessons (*historijski čas*) are typically conducted twice a day: a shorter one during the daily break and an evening one at the campsites. Daily lessons mainly involve testimonies directly related to the actual local geographical sites. The landscape and narrative thus combine to provide a form of “embodied” knowledge about the past events. On the other hand, the evening lessons, by contrast, offer more artistic representations dealing with genocide and its aftermath. Performativity does not manifest only through ritual practice that *a priori* pertains to a commemoration, but it is an important component of the organized programme as well. For instance, all the programmed interventions are staged, either on a distinct constructed stage (at the campsites), or during the breaks along the route, with clear roles assigned to the *performer* and *audience*. At the end of the march, the participants have the opportunity to attend the commemoration followed by a funeral service for the “burial of identified remains of genocide victims, found in mass graves on locations where the march route passed by”.²⁶

25 Detailed information about Srebrenica genocide can be found in Krstić judgment, retrieved from: www.icty.org/case/krstic/4 (Accessed August 29, 2020).

26 Information retrieved from the official website: www.marsmira.org/bs/marsmira.php# (Accessed November 28, 2018).

The *Peace march* as arena of memory includes a range of diverse mnemonic actors, but also incorporates a strong emotional investment and a feeling of the *authenticity* of remembrance. However, this embodied experience towards a symbolical quest of physical space and territory is not pre-mediated to represent a re-enactment *per se*: nor it is described as such by the participants of the march. Nevertheless, I argue that the process of “touch[ing] the past [and discovering] authentic experience by re-enacting history” (Baraniecka-Olszewska 2018, 127) is the outcome and consequence of the *Peace march*. The bodies of the living and the dead are indeed symbolically bonded together during the *march* due to the communicative dimension of the collective memory of the Bosnian war, through testimonies and an active engagement with the space and place. However, even though the *Peace march* retraces the same path of the *Death march*, in reverse order and in completely opposite conditions, it is precisely through differences with the original march that the present-day journey facilitates the flow of memory.

III) PARLIAMENTARY DECLARATION

In the Republic of Serbia’s official discourse the war in Bosnia was, for many years, detached from Serbian involvement, and the Milošević regime never took responsibility for it. After the regime change in 2000 this approach was replaced by a plurality of interpretations which were shaped by party politics and ideological divisions. There was almost no information about the war in Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina.

The Srebrenica case saw many former political and military leaders face trial before the ICTY. The Tribunal indeed was an important factor of change when it came to media shifts of frame regarding the Srebrenica massacre. Nevertheless, the ICTY did not manage to initiate the creation of a “genocide” frame in more conservative outlets, and the Parliamentary declaration on Srebrenica moved that agenda even further away, as will be shown in the following case.

Political elites continuously express their visions of history during political rallies, commemoration practices, and electoral campaigns,

but official versions of past events can also be found in numerous documents produced by the government. In this section, I analyse some of the documents related to the 1991-1995 wars that were triggered by the ICTY judgments; changes in policies of facing the past by the local political interests will be analysed. The focus of this analysis will thus be, once again, representations of the war events and not the real facts. Some of the statements found during the course of analysis politically instrumentalize history or contradict the verdicts of the highest international legal bodies like the International Court of Justice (ICJ) or the ICTY. Dejan Jović accurately notes that the international tribunals “are [...] seen as the main threat to the process of writing history by Ourselves” (2012).

In Serbia, the narrative about the war concentrated on defensive elements, presenting the war as something that had been imposed on Serbia against its will. Therefore, the state policy towards the process of dealing with the past was concentrated on forgetting and denying. For example, the government denied for a long time that the Serbian Army had been present, and instead blamed only the Army of Republika Srpska for its involvement in the war. The consequence of this narrative was the absence of declarations or documents praising military operations, as opposed to Croatia, whose government and veterans could openly show their pride about won battles and victorious units.

Nevertheless, after Milošević’s regime was overthrown and the state control over media was lifted, multiple voices about past war crimes started to spread in the Serbian public sphere. The Srebrenica genocide could not simply be ignored anymore. Several NGOs gathered around the topic of dealing with the past and started campaigning for broader discussions about past atrocities committed in the name of, or simply by, the Serbian state. Another appeal to the parliament was made after the decision of the International Court of Justice in the BiH vs FRY case, when Serbia was cleared of direct responsibility and involvement in the Srebrenica genocide, but failed to prevent the genocide and to bring perpetrators to justice.

As a consequence of these initiatives, coming mostly from civil society, in 2010 the Serbian parliament adopted the Declaration on Srebrenica after being confronted by many MPs. However, the Parliament failed to name Srebrenica as genocide, referring to it instead as a “severely condemned crime committed against Bosniak population in Srebrenica on July 1995”. Discussions that took place during the debate on the declaration resulted in comparing the genocide in Srebrenica with the war crimes committed against Serbs in the nearby municipality of Bratunac. This relativization of guilt made the Srebrenca events look like a consequence of the atrocities perpetrated by the Bosnian Army units in Bratunac. Consequently, the Serbian political elite and public opinion were deeply divided regarding this issue. While the Serbian President, Boris Tadić, attended the tenth anniversary commemoration of the Srebrenica massacre on 11 July 2005, the leaders of the second most important party—the Serbian Radical Party—attended the commemoration in Bratunac. In addition, the adoption of the Declaration on Srebrenica increased requests for condemning crimes committed against members of the Serbian nation and against citizens of Serbia.

Therefore, on 14 October 2010 the Serbian Parliament adopted another declaration, this time addressed to the Serbian nation. This declaration “invited parliaments of other countries, and primarily countries from the territory of the former Yugoslavia, to condemn those crimes (against Serbs) and give full support to their states’ institutions and international institutions in processing perpetrators and to [...] pay respect to Serbian victims”.

CONCLUSION

Transitional justice and collective memory, while being in close contact in every arena of memory, demonstrate nevertheless divergent understandings of the past events. Transitional justice, and especially its judicial mechanisms, always put into focus the

perpetrator and the war crimes, i.e. the process of finding and proving guilt. Collective memory and collective identity addresses communities, and especially communal heroism or victimhood. As the examples analysed in this chapter have shown, the fragile balancing between memory and justice have a major impact on developments and changes of collective identity and of societal understanding of the past.

Finally, the way the politics of memory is negotiated depends very much on the mnemonic entrepreneurs engaged in various arenas of memory. Political agency and leverage is limited by the nature of the event and by the importance of grassroots—as opposed to state-sponsored—events, to the wider public. Thus, the grassroots event in Srebrenica, or the Serbian parliamentary decisions, proved to be less influential in the public sphere, and not only because of the way war events were framed. Instead, collective memory and collective identity are shaped and developed by the mechanisms of communicative memory relying on historical narrative, on one hand, and authentic experience, on the other.

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REMEMBERING TO REMEMBER: MEMORIALIZATION AND COMMEMORATIVE PERFORMANCE OF MISSING PERSONS IN KOSOVO

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ABSTRACT

This book chapter explores the dynamics and patterns of memorialization, commemorative performance, and co-production of memory of missing persons as it has evolved within the framework of transitional justice processes and mechanisms in Kosovo since the end of the conflict in 1999 and post-independence in 2008. More specifically, the chapter discusses memory work and the role of the families of missing persons and other social actors engaging in dealing with the past. Reading the commemorative performances and memory activism, the chapter explores how the memory of missing persons is constructed and in what way memorialization is contributing toward a shared understanding of the recent past in Kosovo. The key questions the chapter seeks to unpack are: How does the past manifest itself in the present? How do mnemonic communities—as networks evolved, maintained, and transformed through processes of collective remembering—commemorate together in Kosovo? How is the past remembered? And to what extent are commemorations of missing persons inclusive and transformative? The chapter argues that cross-community memory activism and commemoration about missing persons offer possibilities for multiple readings of the past and carry the potential for conflict transformation.

Keywords: *missing persons, memorialization, commemoration, memory activism, Kosovo.*

INTRODUCTION

How societies choose to deal with the past has consequences for conflict transformation in the present as well as for the future. As a field of inquiry and practice, dealing with the past relates to peace and justice. It is contextual and embedded in social practices about the past and imaginings for the future of society. Against this backdrop, the chapter explores dynamics and patterns of memorialization, commemorative performance, and co-production of memory of missing persons of the 1998-1999 conflict in Kosovo. The chapter is composed of three main blocks. The first section provides the context of the 1998-1999 Kosovo conflict and the missing persons' issue within the larger framework of transitional justice. It discusses the place that missing persons have assumed in the realm of law, discourses, and accounts of recent history in Kosovo. It shows how the missing persons have been made central in truth-telling work as the whereabouts of more than 1,600 people who disappeared is still unknown (International Committee of the Red Cross, 2021). More importantly, it discusses how, while an important advance has been made with the inclusion of the missing persons in the Kosovo-Serbia political dialogue mediated by the European Union EU, the risks of delayed forensic truth and justice remain at large as the issue has become part of the highly politicized agenda servicing political legitimacy.

The second part presents a topography of the families of the missing persons and the ways of engagement in memory activism and commemorative performance. This section seeks to understand how memorialization – as one of the main components of transitional justice – is contributing to a shared narrative of the recent history of Kosovo. Here the focus is placed on the cross-community activism of families of missing persons, gathered around the civil society organization – the Missing Persons Resource Center (MPRC) – a truth-seeking collective whose advocacy, symbolism, and performativity offer the potential for an inclusive wartime memory and history-

making from below. Subsequently, in the third part, a set of commemorative performances, namely the calendar of the missing persons' commemorations and three case studies of art-based remembrance practices of missing persons are discussed.

The memory work is a process that examines the past through an historical and ethical lens. The examples presented here speak to the role of civic activism and the arts in building an inclusive memory and in creating a space for dialogue about the recent past in Kosovo. The case studies bring forward the power of art for the transformation of conflict and healing, individual and collective. The conclusion offers a reflection on the importance of memorialization and story-making for the demands for truth-seeking and justice. It argues that memory activism regarding missing persons is a counter-memory and strategic commemoration of violence challenging mono-ethnic accounts and narratives of the past. As such, memorialization of missing persons allows micro-histories to coexist carrying the potential for shared memory and for conflict transformation.

TRANSITIONAL JUSTICE AND MISSING PERSONS

Following the nationalist revival in Serbia in the late 1980s, Serbian leader Slobodan Milošević forcibly deprived the Kosovar Albanians of self-government and instituted measures that led to mass violations of human rights and violence. His repressive rule sparked a violent conflict between the Albanians and Serbs in 1998 and 1999, prompting NATO to intervene militarily in a 90 day aerial campaign, leading the way to the international protectorate of the United Nations, until 2008 when Kosovo declared independence. The Kosovo conflict of 1998-1999 resulted in 10,415 Albanians, 2,197 Serbs, and 528 Roma, Bosniaks, and other non-Albanians killed or missing (Humanitarian Law Center, 2011). Missing persons are largely civilians who “disappeared” during, and in the aftermath of, war. 22 years after the war ended, the fate of more than 1,600 persons who went

missing remains largely unknown (International Committee of the Red Cross, 2021) leaving families of missing persons to cope with the “ambiguous loss”, namely of not knowing the whereabouts of their loved ones (Boss, 2004: 551-566).

Transitional justice is a prime vehicle for addressing the harms, loss, and violation of human rights in conflict. Gëzim Visoka and Besart Lumi have argued that, similarly to other post-conflict contexts, in Kosovo “transitional justice is intertwined with ethnic identity leaving no space for consensus on the past and vision of a shared future” (2020: 8) Missing persons as one of the transitional justice issues has redefined social and political relationships, and it has nourished the narratives of victim-centred understandings of the nation. Memorialization is an integral part of transitional justice. As David Couzens Hoy has argued, “... memorialization is an attempt to hold up the past to the eyes of the present” (2009: 101). Hence, memorialization and the “performance” of grief of the families of missing persons offer a deep understanding of the processes, actors, and story-making of the past in the present. Memorialization serves as a platform for demands for truth and justice stretching beyond institutional and state-led memorialization. In fact, bottom-up memorialization practices oftentimes are manifestations of resistance to top-down accounts of Kosovo’s recent history that define justice one-dimensionally and exclusively for one ethnic group (Visoka and Lumi, 2020: 8).

Missing persons is a moral, human rights, and legal right to truth. Truth matters and is vital for justice, healing, the restoration of human dignity, as well as for the contestation of impunity, denial, and amnesia. Truth-seeking and truth-telling are about giving voice to victims to narrate their experiences, healing, and enhancing opportunities for social integration. In Kosovo, truth-seeking and truth-telling have involved work on documentation by Kosovo and international organizations of war crimes and human rights violations. Indeed, the issue of missing persons has remained central in truth-telling work as the whereabouts of a large number are still unknown (Krasniqi, 2020: 11-16).

The missing persons have become part of the legal reform to address war crimes and human rights violations during the Kosovo conflict. In 2011, the Kosovo Assembly adopted the law on the rights and interests of missing persons and their family members. The law establishes the powers and responsibilities of the Governmental Commission on Missing Persons, with the representation of the associations of families of missing persons (Kosovo Assembly, 2011). The law mandates the commission to coordinate search and identification work of missing persons. It affirms family members' right to know about the fate of their relatives. The law emphasizes governments' responsibility to review requests concerning missing persons and to inform family members of the outcome and results of their requests (Kosovo Assembly 2011, Article 10). The Commission is mandated with the power to coordinate the construction of the monument or other initiatives related to honouring of missing persons (Kosovo Assembly 2011, Article 11.4). Moreover, in 2019 the Government of Kosovo adopted a document to review the legislation and institutional support for families of missing persons in Kosovo (Krasniqi, 2020: 11-16).

As one of the main issues of post-war justice, missing persons have remained contingent on the Kosovo-Serbia political dialogue and impunity for the human rights violations and war crimes. The issue of missing persons has suffered from the lack of political will to earnestly practice accountability concomitant with the norms of the international law that has been made part of the legal and institutional reform both in Kosovo and Serbia, along with an inefficient process of searching for, and identification of, the bodies of "disappeared" persons.

After a long process of Kosovo-Serbia negotiations, first facilitated by the United Nations, and since 2011 by the EU, the issue of missing persons has reached the negotiation agenda, and some progress seems to have been made between the parties to act upon the issue of missing persons. Miroslav Lajčák, the EU Special Representative for the Belgrade-Prishtina dialogue and other Western Balkan regional issues has recently announced that

“A positive result of the meeting is the agreement on missing persons because it is painful for the families of the missing persons [...] We are working on this specifically. We are two words closer or farther from the agreement” (Koha Ditore, 2022a).

Following Lajčák’s statement, Albin Kurti, the Prime Minister of Kosovo, aiming to clarify the situation regarding an eventual agreement and specifically the clause “two words closer and/or farther” on missing persons, stated the following:

“There are some issues that have remained without an agreement. I would emphasize one important distinction related to the term missing persons as going missing by violence during the war. Belgrade insists that they are called only missing persons. We demand that it entailed violence in going missing. They are not missing persons due to floods or earthquakes. We have family members that know of a particular person, uniformed or not uniformed, who took their son or daughter, father or mother, and so on. It is about kidnapping, being taken away by force. This is what we are insisting on. Of course, they are missing persons, but they can’t be compared with someone who went missing while hiking. The missing persons are to be considered part of the Serb genocide in Kosovo. It is a conceptual difference that we will see whether we can advance it” (Koha Ditore, 2022b).

However, while the inclusion of missing persons in the Kosovo-Serbia dialogue might have seemed a step toward states’ accountability for determining the fate of missing persons, it exposes the troubled and politically charged entanglements. It is telling that “Missing persons constitute powerful and emotional foci for states to preserve specific collective memories and political legitimacy” (Rauschenbach, Viebach, and Parmentier, 2022: 8).

FAMILIES OF MISSING PERSONS: AGENCY AND MEMORIALIZATION

Dynamics of memory activism “get revealed in symbolism, performativity, and narratives within informal practices” (Rauschenbach, Viebach, and Parmentier, 2022: 15), beyond state-led commemorations. As Hariz Halilovich has argued in relation to the context of Bosnia and Herzegovina, “There is a constant and active interplay between personal and collective memories, enmeshed in a two-way process in which individual memories coalesce into collective memories, while collective memories get adopted and adjusted as individual or personal memories” (Halilovich, 2022: 210). This resonates with the Kosovo context too. Memorialization includes placing memorials, organizing commemorations, and establishing days of remembrance seeking to pay tribute to victims. As such memorialization encourages dialogue on dealing with the legacy of the past, accountability, justice and ending impunity.

Memory activism being both “individual and collective remembering are strongly interconnected drivers of the social dynamics of memory which shape transitional justice processes” (Rauschenbach, Viebach, and Parmentier, 2022: 5). The memory of missing persons is entangled with collective memory and national identity construction. Preserving the memory of missing persons in Kosovo is noticeable in many performances and remembrance activities. Indeed, families of the missing persons in Kosovo seek ways to come to terms with loss through individual and collective remembrance acts. As Rozafa Berisha has pointed out, “the pain of loss gets materialized, visualized and publicly asserted through various mediums in an attempt to cope with, as well as a resist, societal forgetting” (Berisha, 2017: 39). Focusing on the individual memory activism of Ferdonije Qerkezi who has turned her house into a private museum to commemorate the missing family members—her husband, sons, and relatives—in the city of Gjakova in Western Kosovo, Stephanie Schwandner-Sievers and Melanie Klinkner show not only the agency of families of the missing persons and the how the “ambiguous loss” is played out in the individual life of Ferdonije, but also the limits of transitional justice and the lack of victim-centred approaches to dealing with the past. Schwandner-

Sievers and Klinkner argue that the “forensic truth of recuperated bodies, although important, is not enough, justice must be delivered” (Schwandner-Sievers and Klinkner, 2019: 241).

To be sure, “memorialization is about remembering to remember (Couzens Hoy, 2009: 101). However, “the duty to remember for instance points to a blanket and unquestioned need to memorialize the past. [...] this duty to remember can destabilize social cohesion, construct perpetrator-victim binaries or disregard suffering and grief of some groups in volatile post-conflict contexts” (Rauschenbach, Viebach, and Parmentier, 2022: 4).. With this concern in mind, let us turn an eye to the performativity of memory on missing persons and understand how commemorations of missing persons stand against the divisions of mnemonic communities in Kosovo.

The case in point is the Missing Persons Resource Center (hereinafter MPRC) which in the Albanian language translates as Qendra Burimore për Personat e Zhdukur, and in the Serbian language as Resursni Centar za Nestala Lica. The MPRC is a non-governmental organization that “brings together families of missing persons from all ethnic backgrounds, encouraging cooperation among them to share knowledge towards enlightening the fate of missing persons in Kosovo with the mission to serve as a constant reminder to the government in fulfilling their obligations to shed light on the fate of all missing persons in Kosovo” (Missing Persons Resource Center, 2022). Bajram Qerkinaj, a Kosovo Albanian, and Milorad Trifunović, a Kosovo Serb, are co-founders of the MPRC. Through advocacy and commemoration practices, the MPRC has stood against silence over the fate of missing persons across communities, where one ethnic community would not know the fate of the missing persons of the other and *vice-versa*, and has advocated for the right to know the truth (Missing Persons Resource Center, 2022).

Moreover, families of the missing persons gathered around the MPRC have commemorated their loved ones jointly by placing a monument outside of the Kosovo Parliament (see Figure 1.) The two-meter-high marble monument entitled “*To Those We Miss*”, was unveiled in the

capital city, Prishtina, on 27 April 2015 with an inaugural ceremony attended by families of missing persons and senior officials including the then Prime Minister of Kosovo, Isa Mustafa. The memorial is located in Ibrahim Rugova Square in Prishtina within the Kosovo parliament building courtyard, yet barely visible to passers-by. The monument was accompanied by an information plaque stating “this memorial is dedicated to all missing persons from the last war in Kosovo”, written in the Albanian, Serbian, Romani, Turkish, and English languages. The plaque was vandalized and removed from the memorial site (see Figures 1 and 2). The monument was erected by family members and associations as a constant reminder to political leaders for accountability on the issue of missing persons (Office of the Prime Minister, 2015).



Figure 1. “To Those We Miss”: Memorial to the Missing Persons in Kosovo Speaking in Multiple Languages (2015)



Figure 2. “To Those We Miss”: Memorial to the Missing Persons in Kosovo with multilingualism undone (2021)

Indeed, memorials are imbued with plural meanings. They are an expression of memory performance of an unforgettable past, violence, and trauma. Memorials trigger memory but they are shaped by social interactions. As the transmission of memory, this memorial challenges the divided narratives along ethnic lines and dominant perceptions of human loss, human rights violations, and mass atrocities during the 1998-1999 conflict in Kosovo. This memory work stands as a counter-memory, an alternative version of victimhood and war history.

In the dichotomy of “memory work either challenging or sustaining political orders” (Rauschenbach, Viebach, and Parmentier, 2022: 15), the MPRC memorialization of missing persons helps construct micro-narratives of wartime memory shared across ethnic groups. Indeed, memory activism and commemorative performance of the MPRC—and more broadly of the families of missing persons—are not fixed, but fluid, plural and temporal. Its importance lies in the dynamics of memory performance, and meaning-making as they emerge in the processes of truth-seeking that intersect with demands for justice and accountability for the loss and violence endured.

DAYS AND WAYS OF REMEMBRANCE OF MISSING PERSONS

Two commemoration days are observed for missing persons in Kosovo. In February 2007, the Kosovo Parliament declared 27 April the commemoration day of missing persons (Kosovo Assembly, 2007). Kosovo also observes 30 August as the International Day of Victims of Enforced Disappearance. This came into force with the adoption of the United Nations General Assembly Resolution 65/209 International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance, on 21 December 2010 (United Nations, 2010). Kosovo's commemoration day, even though not stated in the Kosovo Assembly decision, is symbolic and associated with the Meja massacre of 27 April 1999 when Serbian "forces killed 376 Kosovo Albanians, including 36 children, who were attempting to flee to neighboring Albania. They were killed in Meja village near Gjakova. Some bodies were buried in mass graves in Kosovo, others were transported to Serbia to be buried in undisclosed places" (Ademi, 2022).

Both remembrance days offer a platform for formal (state) and civil society memory work, along with family members of the missing persons as key actors, which often have included public statements, street actions, and art interventions, among many other activities. An example of civic observance of the Remembrance Day of missing persons is the commemoration entitled "*In the darkness of the missing people. Turn off the lights*". Seeking to bring to attention the "darkness" and "ambiguity loss" that accompanies families of missing persons, this commemorative action invited the larger public in Kosovo to show solidarity and honour the memory of missing persons by turning off the lights in their homes for two minutes. This commemoration initially took place as Covid-19 social distancing measures were restricting movement outside homes at the start of the pandemic in 2020. The commemoration was observed Kosovo-wide, continuing in the following years, with citizens turning off their lights for five minutes beginning in 2021. This is a de-politicized commemoration

performance that is shared not only by the communities of the missing persons themselves but also by the larger public in Kosovo.

REMEMBERING TO REMEMBER: MEMORY ART AND MISSING PERSONS

Social and political discourses have made possible mono-ethnic memorialization practices. The history of the 1998-1999 Kosovo conflict is premised on binary accounts of glorified narratives and experiences of the militarized men on one hand, and victimhood on the other, with missing persons featuring prominently on the latter. Memorials and commemorative performances are sites and events where diverse social actors actively engage in memory-making. In recent years in Kosovo, the arts have become a prominent platform for memorialization and commemorative performances about missing persons. Several art exhibitions and installations and other art projects were dedicated to Kosovo's missing persons. These art interventions have played an important role in creating discursive spaces for the representation of experiences of families of missing persons and voicing demands for justice. Memory art is questioning institutional neglect, impunity, while being aware of the risks of co-optation as the missing persons remain a complex discursive, political, and human rights issue.

Here we offer a brief reading of an art-based commemoration repertoire, more specifically looking at three art-based memorialization of missing persons, being staged over the last years in Prishtina. Grounded in co-production through oral history, archival research, and museum-curated methodology, the exhibition *“Living with the memories of the missing”* narrates stories of family members who were forcefully disappeared during and after the war in Kosovo (see Figure 3).¹

1 The “Living with memories of the missing” exhibition was an initiative of the forumZFD program in Kosovo and Integra. It was opened on 15 February 2019. Eliza Hoxha curated the exhibition. Images part of the exhibition are of Atthe Mulla.



Figure 3. *“Living with the memories of the missing”: A call for accountability*

The exhibition blends narratives, images, and conceptual art to reflect on the individual, collective and political responsibility in uncovering the fate of the wartime missing persons and recognizing family members' experiences of “ambiguous loss”. The exhibition was staged at the Kosovo Assembly building and is open to the public.



Figure 4. *“Dealing with the Forgotten”: Against oblivion*

Framing missing persons in terms of the disremembered, the exhibition entitled “*Dealing with the Forgotten*” which opened in February 2020, at the National Library of Kosovo, in Prishtina, documents gross human rights violations and calls for the right to know about the fate of missing persons. The photographs and stories transmit the narratives of family members, their longings, and the absence of the missing persons in everyday life (forumZFD, 2021) as for the family members thinking of their loved ones is a part of everyday life. Thinking—hence remembering—is a continuous engagement for families of missing persons. The exhibition is an invitation against forgetting and oblivion.



Figure 5. “*A grave is better than not knowing*”: Lingerin “ambiguous loss”

Borrowing from a family member of a missing person, “*A grave is better than not knowing*”, Kumrije Jahmurataj, whose husband’s whereabouts remain unknown,² says this art intervention “explores absence and remembering, creating space for staging memories and sentiments that have been marginalized in the political discourse” (Halilaj, 2022). Thus, art transports the experiences of the loss of missing persons’ family members. They are memories of

² Exhibition curated by Driton Selmani and Blerta Hoçja, commissioned by the Humanitarian Law Center Kosovo.

the past and fragments of lived experiences in the void of silence and uncertainty surrounding the missing persons.

Moreover, this art teaches how grief, trauma, and memory can be experienced. It also speaks to the potential that art and civic activism contain for the creation of alternative ways of memorialization. It draws attention to the need to look closely at the intersections of art, memory, and civic activism for openings of inclusive memorialization. While the issue of missing persons resides in an ocean of uncertainty, the power of imagery and memory is utilized in the art to weave micro-narratives and a bottom-up history of the 1998-1999 Kosovo conflict. The symbolic power of art is to transmit a sense of the lived experience of the loss of the family members of the missing persons. It is through art that families of missing persons exercise agency, and thus they are not mere spectators, but actors in the co-production of memory.

All these three cases are telling of the role of arts in memory and narrative creation central to identity construction. As Maja Savić-Bojanić and Ilir Kalemaj have argued, “art memorialization is a way to witness, document and evidence past atrocities, and also to commemorate those lost and their living families. But, the most powerful expression of memory art is in creating a counter-narrative” (Savić-Bojanić and Kalemaj, 2022: 281-282). Utilization of art in the commemoration performance of missing persons is exemplary of the paradigm of “art as dialogue” concerned with the “process of creating dialogue to acknowledge multiple truths and focusing on trust-building and restoration of broken relationships as a precondition for understanding the ‘Other’” (Savić-Bojanić and Kalemaj, 2022: 282). Thus, recovering the past through remembrance, this memory art calls for reflection and interpretation in order to achieve a critical awareness about the past.

CONCLUSIONS

The chapter has explored memory work and commemorative performance around missing persons as they have evolved within the larger frame of transitional justice as a prime vehicle for addressing the harms of the past in post-war and post-independence Kosovo. The chapter shows the role of memorialization as a tool against impunity, a process of demands for justice and accountability challenging mono-ethnic narratives of the history of the 1998-1999 Kosovo conflict. Moreover, the chapter relates to the importance of the agency of the families of missing persons in memorialization as a moral move for broader social dialogue and dealing with the past. It has shown that as a constitutive element of collective memory, memorialization and story-making are a platform for truth-seeking and demanding justice.

Memory activism and commemorative performance are a form of recognition of loss and pain that shape the social construction of the past. The memorial of the missing persons of the cross-community initiative of the MPRC is a counter-memory standing against the mono-ethnic and politicized wartime narratives, a shared memory space fundamental for social imaginations and visions of the future. Moreover, memory activism and commemorative performance about missing persons challenge linear and institutionalized historical accounts, offering possibilities for multiple readings of the past and micro-histories to coexist in the public sphere and carrying the potential for the transcendence of conflict through shared memory. As a social process of truth-seeking, truth-telling, and justice, memory activism enables a micro-history from below. More importantly, memorialization is a site of ethical engagement and critical reflection toward an inclusive collective memory, open to contestation, dialogue, and re-imagination.

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CLINGING TO NATIONAL VICTIMHOOD: BOSNIAK POST-WAR MEMORY POLITICS OF THE SREBRENICA MASS KILLINGS

Tomasz Rawski

ABSTRACT

This article is about how nationalist elites in contemporary Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) instrumentalized the war past for political purposes throughout the first fifteen years after the end of the last war. The author argues that in the public discourse of BiH we have witnessed an uninterrupted persistence of nationalist commemorative strategies throughout this entire period, despite the opposing efforts of the international community. Based on the example of the post-war Bosniak memory politics of the 1995 Srebrenica mass killings, the article reveals the long-term persistence of the nationalist commemorative strategy, rooted in the dialectic mechanism of consolidating and antagonising relevant reference groups and responsible for structuring the national memories of the last war according to an exclusivist martyrological model. Based on the Bosniak case, a more universal political mechanism, one characteristic also of the post-war Bosnian Serb and Bosnian Croat nationalist factions, is described.

Keywords: memory politics; Srebrenica; national victimhood; Bosnia and Herzegovina

INTRODUCTION

This article is about how nationalist elites in contemporary Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) instrumentalized the war past for political purposes throughout the first fifteen years after the end of the last war¹. I argue that in the public discourse of BiH we have witnessed an uninterrupted persistence of nationalist commemorative strategies throughout this entire period, despite the International Community's (IC) heavy efforts to marginalize and eliminate such strategies and the radical memory discourses they produced.

Below I discuss this persistence using the example of post-war Bosniak memory politics of the 1995 Srebrenica mass killings. I show how, between 1995 and 2011, the main representatives of the Bosniak political faction used the nationalist strategy based on the dialectic of consolidating their own national population and antagonising other communities—including the International Community (IC) in Bosnia, the Bosnian Serb, and the Serbian factions—to produce, develop, and maintain, in the public sphere, an interpretation of the Srebrenica killings, according to which this event was not much more than a cornerstone of exclusively Bosniak national identity based on religious victimhood.

Based on this case, I describe a more universal political mechanism that is also characteristic of the contemporary Bosnian Serb and the Bosnian Croat nationalist factions. Since 1995, these three factions have been mirror images of one another, and although they differed in the symbolic contents they used, they nevertheless shared identical ways of using this content at the very same political moments. I discuss the Bosniak case, since it remains under-researched in comparison to the other two.

In the article, I combine a political sociology perspective, aimed at revealing the mechanisms underpinning political actions (e.g. Bernhard

1 This article is a revised and slightly modified version of: Rawski, T. (2021). The Persistence of National Victimhood: Bosniak Post-War Memory Politics of the Srebrenica Mass Killings. *Sprawy Narodowościowe/Nationalities Affairs* 53, 1-23.

& Kubik, 2014; Malešević, 2006), with a cultural analysis, aimed at tracking down the symbolic changes that result from these actions (e.g. Olick, 1998, 1999). It is a moderately instrumentalist approach that prioritises the political aspect (strategies) over the symbolic one (representations). It is also a top-down approach that considers memory politics as the domain of, primarily, professional political actors who occupy dominant positions in a political field, thus setting the framework for the remaining actors. In the case of post-war BiH, for each of the three dominant nationalist factions (i.e. the Bosniak, the Bosnian Serb, and the Bosnian Croat), three groups of actors are crucial: (a) professional politicians affiliated with a party in power in a given national segment; (b) the leadership of the nation's major religious institution; (c) war veterans associated with the army that participated in the last war. Therefore, the Bosniak nationalist faction consists of: (a) politicians from the Party of Democratic Action (SDA, dominant in 1995–2000, 2002–2006, and after 2010), the Party for Bosnia and Herzegovina (SBiH, dominant in 2006–2010), and the Union for a Better Future (SBB, important after 2009); (b) the leadership of the Islamic Community (IZ), gathered around Reis-ul-Ulema Mustafa Cerić; (c) high army officers with a background in the Army of the Republic of BiH (ARBiH).

This article builds on the existing literature about memory trends in post-war BiH (e.g. Hajdarpašić, 2010; Moll, 2013; Sokol, 2014) and memory politics regarding the Srebrenica mass killings (e.g. Bougarel, 2007, 2012; Duijzings, 2007; Pollack, 2010). However, instead of entering a strand of law-oriented research on ICTY (e.g. Nettefeld & Wagner, 2013; Subotić, 2010), or focusing on static products of state policy, like school textbooks (e.g. Torsti, 2007), or offering a deeper yet fragmented view of political processes (e.g. Kostadinova, 2014), I provide a systematic analysis of public discourse that shows the full dynamics of Bosniak memory politics in the public space of BiH between 1995 and 2011.

Methodologically, the article is based on a problem-oriented sociological discourse analysis (Fairclough, 2005; Wodak et al., 2009) of the commemorative message delivered on subsequent

anniversaries of the Srebrenica mass killings (July 11) by three main media outlets, largely controlled by the Bosniak nationalist faction: *Dnevni Avaz*, *Ljiljan*, and *Preporod*.² In the course of my argument, I refer to three dimensions of this message: the central speeches delivered by Bosniak officials during commemorations on 11 July; the central symbolic practices carried out as part of the commemorations; and the accompanying message related to the anniversary, but published a few days before or after July 11.

Importantly, being aware that the legal concept of “the Srebrenica genocide” is both consistently politically denied and overused by the main nationalist factions in Bosnia, in this article I use the term “Srebrenica mass killings” in order to emphasise the un-involvement of my analysis in any of these attempts. This approach is close to the findings of David (2020), who encourages us to distinguish between normative Western models of interpreting the past produced by a quasi-universal human rights memorialisation agenda, on the one hand, and how they are used by local political forces for their own purposes in countries where this agenda is imposed, on the other. It is crucial to recognise that, in the case of BiH, this difference converges particularly in the concept of “the Srebrenica genocide”.

CLARIFYING NATIONAL VICTIMHOOD

The Srebrenica mass killings were made the cornerstone of Bosniak memory politics until the end of the 1990s, during a period of extreme political polarisation of three nationalist factions in Bosnia and their lack of confidence in the peace-building mission led by the IC. It was professional politicians from SDA, led by Alija Izetbegović, who eventually gained primacy in the symbolic framing of this event on behalf of the whole Bosniak faction. Initially, however, the IZ's leadership (Mustafa Cerić, Husein Kavazović) and the ARBiH

² All quotations in the article have been translated from the Bosnian language into English by the author.

officers (e.g. Ramiz Bećirović, Rasim Delić) were stronger in putting forward their interpretative patterns that I term the “heroic” and the “hellish”. Both of them appeared in media messages during the first year after the event, the former mostly in the *Ljiljan* and the latter in the *Dnevni Avaz*. While the heroic pattern exposed a variant of national martyrdom that preferred the heroism of the “Bosniaks of Srebrenica” over the victimhood of the murdered people, the hellish one was rooted in religious victimhood, i.e. the Koranic images of hell.

The interpretative axis of the heroic pattern was the long march of refugees displaced by the Bosnian Serb forces from the enclave and led by the soldiers of the 28th ARBiH Division towards Tuzla, i.e. the territory controlled by the Bosniak forces (Hajdarević, 1995; Husejnović, 1995). According to this pattern, members of the Bosniak nation survived this murderous march not only by retaining internal solidarity, but above all owing to the activities of its heroised guards: soldiers and imams who defended them from the Bosnian Serb Army (VRS). The heroisation of the soldier was based, firstly, on building his monolithic image as a steadfast humanist warrior who always made the right strategic decisions and combined attempts to inflict severe losses on the enemy with the desire to protect his own nation. Secondly, it rested upon describing the soldier as a refugee of stability who never showed fear or panicked, always walking the front line, taking the enemy’s fire upon himself, and expressing his utmost devotion to the nation by dying a heroic death (e.g. Spahić, 1995). In turn, the heroisation of the imam consisted, firstly, of depriving him of his superhuman attributes by inscribing him into the community of national suffering experienced by ordinary civilians: hunger, lack of sleep, fear, exhaustion. The second move was to make the imam a spiritual leader of the Bosniak nation, capable of interpreting the extreme collective experience as a test for the nation’s maturity.

Although the hellish pattern also exposed the refugee march, it interpreted it differently, i.e. as an apocalyptic journey through the abyss of suffering (Kozar, 1996; Numanović, 1996b), during which

the Bosniaks were forced by the VRS to break through a burning forest, fell into traps, went mad after inhaling hallucinogenic gases, etc. This scheme focused on exploring the symbolism of victimhood and the metaphors of a broken nation. Thus, two of the most important topics were: the topic of simultaneous physical and spiritual suffering, characteristic of the Koranic vision of hell; and the symbol of a lost, lonely refugee. The first one was evident in the descriptions of collective hallucinations triggered by poison sprayed by the VRS, which not only drove individual Bosniaks mad and led them to commit suicide, but also divided the whole national community by sparking mutual acts of violence, including murders of co-nationals. It was clear also in the descriptions of the inability to satisfy hunger and thirst by the refugees, even in cases when food or water were within their reach. As for the lost refugee motif, as he accidentally moved away from his co-nationals, he found himself in hell. Wandering around in search of his way back, he walked on a carpet of decaying human corpses, drowned in a sea of Bosniak blood, and kept encountering “fragmented corpses, parts of bodies and heads everywhere” (Numanović, 1996a).

The SDA leadership took over the initiative during the third anniversary of the event. However, their commemorative direction had already been set by Alija Izetbegović at the anniversary celebrations in Tuzla in 1996 and 1997, where he gave **priority to the victimhood** optics over the heroic, and developed a **two-track interpretation of the Srebrenica mass killings**. On the one hand, Izetbegović monumentalised Srebrenica in national terms as “a symbol for the countless places of massacre in Bosnia” and “the deepest of all Bosnian wounds” (A. Izetbegović, 1996, 1997), while on the other hand he articulated it in universalist terms, i.e. as “a tragedy that affects every human being and every woman in the world” (A. Izetbegović, 1997). While the first, consolidatory message was addressed to the members of the Bosniak nation, the second one was addressed to the IC and international public opinion, aiming to legitimise the memory of the mass killings globally. The latter

line of argumentation was fully articulated by Mustafa Spahić in his 1997 anniversary appeal to Bosniak artists for an intensive “cultural universalisation of Srebrenica” (Spahić, 1997).

After reducing the symbolic significance of ARBiH officers in the official message, by having placed victimhood as the primary interpretative lens, the SDA leadership attempted to marginalise the role of the IZ leadership by desacralizing this victimhood, i.e. **minimising its religious dimension**. The latter was made possible by introducing a new, quasi-independent political actor onto the commemorative stage: the Mothers of Srebrenica.³ This allowed the SDA to put the victim-mother symbol at the very heart of the official memory of the event. Izetbegović played the main role in involving the Mothers of Srebrenica in memory politics, as he gave up the floor to them in 1997 during his central speech (Huremović, 1997). Later, on behalf of the whole nation, he sent them an open letter of support in recognition of their suffering (A. Izetbegović, 1997).

The victim-mother symbol turned out to be a particularly meaningful motif for several reasons. Firstly, it referred directly to the problem of the physical destruction of families during the Srebrenica mass killings. Here, the mother was presented as the main victim of the displacements, i.e. the symbolic foundation of the family who, after her natural life space had been destroyed and her family ties cut, was condemned to lifelong suffering. A series of articles from 1997 depict the mother as an old, weak lady in despair (Šogolj, 1997; M. Smajlović, 1997). Without family, the mother was presented as defining herself only through its absence: “I am Zahida – I do not have four sons [...]” (A. Hadžić, 1997). Secondly, the newspapers depicted the enormity of the damage the enemy inflicted on the Bosniak nation and pointed to the disintegration of internal collective solidarity by using the symbolism of the powerless mother being at the mercy of

³ Full name: Mothers of the Enclaves of Srebrenica and Žepa – the association of the enclaves’ female refugees who lost their husbands, sons, and brothers in the mass executions in Srebrenica, headed by Munira Subašić. It was founded in 1995 with the active participation of the SDA politicians (e.g. Ibran Mustafić).

strangers in refugee centres or barely surviving on humanitarian aid. Thirdly, the victim-mother motif made it possible to combine the symbolism of the survivor-refugee with that of the dead victim, since finding the latter became the central aspiration of the Association's representatives (e.g. Delić, 1999; A. Hadžić, 1997, 1998).

The Mothers of Srebrenica became a key symbol of national victimhood during the 1999 central anniversary celebrations when they received support from the IZ leadership which accompanied them in taking the first post-war trip to Potočari. This trip allowed the Mothers to act as the representative of the whole Bosniak faction in the relationship with the IC by sending the latter a letter with three demands regarding Srebrenica: humanitarian (the IC should find missing persons), legal (they should adequately punish those guilty of crimes), and symbolic (they should erect a plaque in Potočari to commemorate their own co-responsibility for the mass killings).

Interestingly, this move facilitated a partial breakthrough in the all-faction consensus regarding the antagonising message, i.e. the way the image of a national enemy was built. While initially there prevailed the image of a total enemy represented by the Bosnian Serb forces supported by the alleged anti-Bosniak collusion of Banja Luka, Belgrade, and the International Community – all of which were said to aim at the extermination of the Bosniak nation – after the year 1999 the situation changed. With the Mothers' demands addressed to the IC, media started assigning a more ambivalent role to the IC as being co-responsible for the tragedy, yet not having parleyed with Banja Luka or Belgrade, who remained the arch-enemies.

In short, the SDA leadership gained advantage over its two main internal rivals owing to making two re-articulations of the Srebrenica mass killings: firstly, by taking the victimhood optics to the fore and, secondly, by desacralising this victimhood in favour of the mother symbol as its main representation.

BETWEEN DE-NATIONALISATION AND RE-ARTICULATION

After a moderate turn in BiH in autumn 2000, due to the loss of political power by three nationalist factions in favour of the social democrats, the Bosniak faction developed Izetbegović's two-track commemorative strategy. On the one hand, they strengthened the universalist perspective in order to meet the IC's growing expectations, according to which all nationalist camps should seek cooperation with one another. They put it to the fore in central anniversary speeches since the first commemoration held in Potočari (2000). On the other hand, they kept developing the nationalist perspective, based on a consolidatory-antagonising framework, in the message regarding the central symbolic practices in Potočari and in the accompanying message.

As for the universalist perspective, the Bosniak faction modified their central speeches so as to make Srebrenica a place of the symbolic reconciliation of all three parties to the conflict. For a more detailed discussion of this perspective, please see the original article. Here I would like to show how the Bosniak media kept the nationalist perspective in their message regarding symbolic practices and the accompanying message. They fostered the consolidatory rhetoric by re-articulating national victimhood in religious terms again, and by inscribing it into a wider metaphor of the Bosniak nation coming back home: both culminating in the annual collective funeral of the killed victims that became part of the central event since 2004, with the mother symbol as the bonding element. The central event on 11 July was annually framed as a moment of national consolidation of Bosniaks from all around the world in their cradle in Potočari: starting with the speculations led by *Dnevni Avaz* on both the number of towns from BiH, and other countries, whose inhabitants would participate in the event, as well as the number of buses prepared by the authorities to transport people there. Next, the appearance of the national buses in Potočari was described as a moment of the grassroots renewal of national solidarity. By recalling such moments

as the spontaneous prayers in a “unique, five-thousand *jamaat*⁴ [formed by] the bus passengers” (S. Smajlović, 2001; see also: NN, 2004), the Bosniak nation was presented as a community bound by strong collective emotions that reproduced itself instinctively and uncontrollably, thus escaping institutional limitations.

The religious symbolisation of national victimhood intensified particularly after the opening of the Srebrenica-Potočari Memorial Centre and Cemetery⁵ in September 2003, when the annual ceremonial funeral of the exhumed remains of selected victims was introduced. The media covered the funeral as the most significant commemorative practice of a consolidatory character by presenting it as a moment of two-stage national reunification of the living and dead Bosniaks, thus creating a vision of the nation as an eternal being. While the living arrived at the spot in hundreds of coaches, the remains of the dead arrived in hundreds of coffins in a truck column that always followed the same route.

The first stage of the reunification included the collective greeting of the trucks in Potočari, on the eve of the central event, by the Mothers of Srebrenica and the families of the victims, and the unloading of the coffins into the outstretched hands of the waiting crowd, who carried them to the battery factory, the main crime scene in July 1995, now serving as the staging area for the burial. The aesthetics of the coffins symbolised only the collective dimension of the victimhood, i.e. they all had the same shape and size; they were entirely covered with a green canvas referring to Islam; they differed from each other only by ordinal number.⁶

4 *Jamaat* – a gathering of a group of followers of Islam for some specific purpose (e.g. interpreting religion or mourning the dead together).

5 The Centre was financed by the IC. The construction lasted two years, i.e. in July 2001 the foundation stone was laid and in September 2003 it was ceremonially opened in the presence of Bill Clinton, who had been President of the United States in July 1995. Now, the official name of the Centre is: The Srebrenica-Potočari Memorial and Cemetery for the Victims of the 1995 Genocide.

6 They were all mass funerals with several hundred victims buried each year.

The second stage was a funeral ceremony, held during the central event on 11 July, which included the collective transfer of coffins to the cemetery in front of the crowd of thousands; a series of ritualised mourning actions, including the lamentation of the Mothers of Srebrenica over the fresh graves; and a collective farewell prayer led by Mustafa Cerić which culminated in a peculiar dialogue between the living and the dead, improvised by the IZ leader (e.g. Sinanović, 2004). Apart from exhibiting the attribute of the eternity of the Bosniak nation, the coverage of this dialogue emphasised the multi-generational obligation to cultivate the memory of murdered co-nationals. The whole funeral was presented as an act of intertwining individual histories of Bosniak families into one identical national fate, condensed in the religious victimhood.

The antagonising rhetoric was kept in the message regarding the central symbolic practices and oriented towards the Bosnian Serbs, particularly by presenting the bus journeys as a renewal of confrontation with the perpetrators (e.g. Borović, 2000; Mandal, 2001). The message indicated that the first impression of participants after leaving the buses was fear that the “Bosniak house” was still inhabited by strangers. The media reported that the travellers feared faces of the perpetrators seen in house windows or among the local police units. They also kept depicting the Serbs as bloodthirsty aggressors throwing stones at Bosniak buses or waving nationalist flags (e.g. Hodžić, 2001). Finally, they fostered the antagonising rhetoric by using the life-and-death dichotomy, i.e. by contrasting the post-war Serb-inhabited Srebrenica, depicted as a dead city that had lost the basic features of social life, i.e. religion, civilisation, and connection with the world, with the momentary rebirth of life, light, and hope, brought by the returning Bosniaks (S. Smajlović, 2001, 2002).

Returning to framing national victimhood in religious terms, the accompanying message was additionally strengthened by the symbolisation of the bones of the murdered victims, and the *nišan*, i.e. a white Islamic tombstone. While the bone symbolism

was first used in 2000 by Aziz Kadribegović, the editor-in-chief of the *Preporod*, to criticise the rapprochement of the Bosniak faction with the IC, the *nišan* symbolism was introduced two years later in the discussion on the symbolic meaning of the Memorial Centre. On the one hand, Kadribegović used the bones as a metaphor of a broken Bosniak nation, arguing that the bones were “the remains of the Srebrenica martyrs” (Kadribegović, 2000), i.e. the holy national relics that should all be found and buried in order to restore national dignity to the Bosniaks. On the other hand, the *nišan* motif was used as a counterbalance to the IC’s vision of the Memorial Centre as a meeting place of the local and the universal, devoid of any national symbolism (Čukle, 2003). The architects of the Centre tried to render the inclusive symbolism of Srebrenica through an appropriate spatial arrangement and placement of symbolic objects – such as the ossuary – in this space. However, the supporters of the *nišan* motif countered this by pointing out that the tombstone should be the most visible element of the Centre as the key symbol representing Srebrenica’s collective victimhood. They argued that the ubiquity of *nišan* should go hand in hand with its uniform appearance (Kadribegović, 2002), but also that every *nišan* should contain a Koranic inscription confirming that the victim has the status of *šehid*,⁷ i.e. a martyr for the Islamic faith. It was an obvious reference to the Bosniak wartime memory politics, when *šehid* was turned into a synonym of a national hero (Bougarel, 2007: 167–192). As they achieved both goals, in subsequent years the Centre filled up with thousands of *nišans* and the Bosniak media began calling it the *šehid cemetery*.⁸

7 It is the verse 154 from Al-Baqarah (2:154) that states: “And do not say about those who are killed in the way of Allah, ‘They are dead.’ Rather, they are alive, but you perceive [it] not.”

8 For a detailed analysis of the 1992–1995 Bosnian war monuments as vehicles for three mutually exclusive nationalist narratives, see Sokol (2014).

GROWING IN THE SHADOW

The 2005–2006 political turnaround in Bosnia not only brought radicals from all three nationalist factions to power again,⁹ but also caused internal division in the IC regarding the peace-building mission (Sebastian, 2014: 167–169). This coincided with the intense internationalisation of the memory of Srebrenica since 2005, which provided more opportunities for the Bosniak faction to show off to the international audience. Thus, the Bosniak leaders kept promoting the universalist perspective in the central speeches in Potočari, episodically punctuated by an annually repeated demand to liquidate the RS based on the argument that it was a “genocidal creation” (e.g. Delić, 2005; Malkić, 2007). They also started intermingling the universalist perspective with their consolidating-antagonising approach in the central symbolic practices. Again, for a more detailed discussion of these processes, please see the original article.

Here I focus on the most important trend on the ground, i.e. the regaining of dominance by the nationalist perspective, which was clear in the accompanying message. The next step in the development of the religiously framed national victimhood was replacing the mother symbol with the *šehid* symbol as the main representation of Bosniak martyrdom. One of the key moments marking this shift was the sermon given by Cerić in Potočari two weeks before the 2006 central commemoration, where he stated that “Potočari is a valley of Bosnian *šehids*” (Cerić, 2006), thus publicly describing the victims of Srebrenica as *šehids* for the first time in the accompanying message. In other words, Cerić not only elevated to the verbal level the symbol that had been previously re-introduced into Bosniak memory politics as part of the Koranic inscriptions on *nišans*, but he also framed this symbol in the national, and not universal, terms. Furthermore, he inscribed the victimhood

⁹ In the Bosniak camp, it was the SBiH led by the freshly radicalised Haris Silajdžić, who in the 1990s was known as the leader of the moderate Bosniak faction.

of the Bosnian *šehids* into the Koranic history by comparing the *šehids* from Potočari to the *šehids* from the Battle of Uhud.¹⁰

The media coverage of the 2006 sermon in Potočari was the first clear signal of sharpening the consolidatory-antagonising perspective by the IZ leadership, quickly followed in the *Preporod* by the partial reactivation of the symbolism known from the late 1990s. Thus, on the one hand, the reactivation of *gazija*¹¹ symbol, inextricably linked to the *šehid* symbol, signalled the reintroduction of the “hellish” pattern already in 2006, when *gazija* returned in a literary story about a Srebrenica Bosniak named Hamza, who became a victim of the mass executions (Džafić, 2006). The author captured Hamza at the time of the transition between the *gazija* and *šehid* statuses, when he was led to death by the VRS. Hamza brought back memories of the struggle against the enemy, about fighting blindly in the dark, which was interrupted by a series of rifles. This started a detailed description of the process of transforming him into *šehid* (Džafić, 2006). On the other hand, the “heroic” pattern was reintroduced in 2007 by Alija Jusić, i.e. the same author who a decade earlier had built the image of the imam as a link between the nation and the army. This time he elaborated on the imam symbol as a representative of the avant-garde of *Bosnian šehids* (Jusić, 2007). By exposing the heroic commitment of 29 Srebrenica imams, most of them murdered, to maintaining national solidarity and support for ARBiH soldiers during the mass killings, Jusić added his contribution to the radicalisation of the accompanying message.

Simultaneously, the antagonising rhetoric was gaining momentum, feeding on the deepening antagonism between the Bosniak and

10 The battle of Uhud was fought in the year 625 by Medina Muslims led by Prophet Muhammad against the Bedouin tribe Quraysh of Mecca. The hero summoned by Cerić was to die in this battle after having inflicted impressive losses on opponents, and was then hailed as “the first among the *šehids*”.

11 *Gazija/ghazi* is a term for an Islamic warrior who fights against infidels. In the 1990s, the Bosniak media used this term alongside the *šehid* category (see e.g. Kadribegović, 1995).

the Bosnian Serb factions. More precisely, in response to the confrontational stance of the Republic of Srpska (RS) leadership which took under official patronage the counter-celebrations organised on 12 July 2007 by the local neo-Nazi movement (A. Hadžić, 2007), the Bosniak media message sharpened the course in two ways. Firstly, they introduced an extensive coverage of the newly introduced symbolic practice of the public opening of mass graves of killed victims just before the central event in Potočari. This practice was covered each year and allowed the Bosniak media to send a drastic accompanying message, both exposing the act of opening graves as well as publicising memoirs about the torturers who were said to have murdered Bosniaks with blunt axes, buried them alive, burned their corpses, etc.

Secondly, the central event in 2007 marked the return to the symbolic discrediting of international activities in Potočari, inaugurated by the harsh criticism of Carla del Ponte, the then chief prosecutor of the ICTY, put forward by the Mothers of Srebrenica. During a meeting with del Ponte, Munira Subašić accused her of hypocrisy and exceptional sluggishness in chasing down Radovan Karadžić and Ratko Mladić, claiming this was a product of the reconciliatory policy pursued by the IC. This way, for the first time since the late 1990s, the Bosniak faction publicly equated a part of the IC with the Bosnian Serbs by addressing del Ponte with the words: “You will hang on the fence of shame in Potočari together with the Chetniks who murdered our children” (Subašić, 2007).

OUT OF THE SHADOWS

Thus, until 2008, the consolidatory message based on the religious symbolisation of national victimhood was already strongly present in two out of three dimensions of the media message regarding Srebrenica. However, it remained largely absent in the central speeches in Potočari. After 2010, however, the *šehid* symbol was introduced even here.

This happened during the commemorations in 2010 and 2011, when the continued alienation of the Bosniak faction from the IC, combined with the deepening antagonism between Sarajevo and Banja Luka, led the Bosniak leadership to openly announce a break with the reconciliatory line that the faction had followed for the previous decade. At first, Mustafa Cerić, in his 2010 speech, demanded that the IC should reduce the political pressure on the Bosniak faction, and leave them more space to develop their nationalist perspective: “stop blaming us for our faith, culture and willingness to have a home and a state that will protect us from genocide” (Silajdžić, 2010). Next, he announced the Bosniak turn towards the optics of nationalist particularism by openly speaking of three different ethnic communities living in Bosnia, i.e. something that had been a taboo on the stage in Potočari for the previous decade. This finally led Cerić to introduce the *šehid* symbol into his speech, thus switching the main addressee of his central speech from the IC to his co-nationals, whom he asked to “cultivate the memory of the *šehids*” (Silajdžić, 2010).

Just a year later, both Mustafa Cerić and Bakir Izetbegović (i.e. the son of Alija Izetbegović and the newly emerging leader of the SDA) in their 2011 central speeches took another step towards particularism, i.e. they announced the shift from forward-looking reconciliatory optics to the past-looking optics characteristic of the late 1990s, by stating: “In Potočari, everything looks the same as it did sixteen years ago” (Cerić, 2011b). To make this message even stronger, Bakir Izetbegović quoted a fragment of his father’s 1997 speech, which emphasised that national victimhood definitely came back to the heart of Bosniak memory politics: “Srebrenica is the deepest wound on the body of a tormented Bosniak nation” (B. Izetbegović, 2011). The 2011 consolidatory message was additionally strengthened by Cerić, who openly appealed to the Bosniak audience to renew the collective oath of solidarity in the name of defending the nation against the supposedly imminent repeat of the tragedy. He then emphasised service to the nation as the overriding obligation of every Bosniak, including the sacrifice of one’s life for the nation’s survival (Cerić, 2011a).

Moreover, this was accompanied by the open articulation of the *šehid* symbol in the consolidatory message regarding symbolic practices in Potočari, which can be illustrated by two examples. Firstly, since almost a decade of solemn mass funerals had led to the conciliation symbolism of the Memorial Centre being obscured by its martyrdom symbolism, focused on the cemetery filled with thousands of white *nišans* with the Koranic inscriptions, the latter started to be regularly portrayed in media as “the white city of *šehids*, the innocently murdered Bosniaks” (e.g. S. Smajlović, 2011). Secondly, the *šehid* symbol eventually gained dominance over the motif of the suffering woman-victim in such a way that since 2010 the woman has now been depicted mostly as the mother of *šehid*: either proud of the martyrdom of their children, or an innocent victim who had irreversibly lost the sense of her life (Ibidem).

Finally, as for the antagonistic message, a further tightening of the political course brought about a gradual return of the 1990s **motif of a total enemy** as comprising not only the Bosnian Serb or the Serbian factions, but also the IC as a whole. Regarding the latter, 2010 Cerić’s speech included an open accusation against the IC of passivity, cynicism, and hypocrisy. Not only did he accuse the IC of humiliating the victims of the mass killings through superficial rhetorical involvement in commemorating the mass killings, not followed by real improvements, but he also attributed a conscious co-responsibility to the IC for the tragedy in the same way as in the 1990s (Pozder, 2010). A year later, Cerić announced the end of illusions about the supposed benefits to be expected from the IC, and advised the nation to “cure ourselves of naivety and credulity” (Cerić, 2011a). Regarding the Bosnian Serbs, the Bosniak faction went on to openly emphasise the category of genocide to prove the continuity of political goals between war criminals and the current political leadership of the RS, which, meanwhile, institutionalised a radical counter-memory of the Srebrenica “massacre”. The central argument here was that all post-war RS authorities were to preserve the results of the 1995 genocide. The pace of the radicalisation of

the antagonistic message was so high that already in his 2011 central speech Mustafa Cerić accused the entire Serbian nation of being murderers (Cerić, 2011a), and radical publicists announced the end of the Bosniak reconciliation policy, claiming on behalf of the killed victims: “We will not forgive” (Memić, 2011).

Interestingly enough, the further emergence of the nationalist perspective out of the shadows was abruptly stopped by the internal political fragmentation of the Bosniak faction in 2012, which was one of the results of the IC’s failed intervention in the electoral process in BiH (Kostić, 2017). This brought to the fore in Potočari the chaotic and scattershot actions of particular nationalist factions. Thus, when Bakir Izetbegović managed to take over the leadership of the internally divided Bosniak faction at the beginning of 2015, the nationalist perspective was at the same time well-established at the heart of the memory politics in Srebrenica, and overshadowed by the chaos of the preceding few years. Therefore, the question of its further use to radicalise the political agenda remained open.

CONCLUSIONS

The analysis presented here reveals that the origins of the contemporary radicalisation of memory politics in BiH lie in the long-term persistence of nationalist memory politics in post-war BiH. Based on the example of the activities of the Bosniak political faction in relation to the Srebrenica mass killings, I have shown how the consolidatory-antagonising commemorative strategy, responsible for structuring the national memory of the last war according to a martyrological model, has managed to stay afloat in the public space despite the periodical increase in significance of the opposite, IC-backed cooperative commemorative strategy aimed at transcending national particularisms in the name of the reconciliation between the conflicted nations. Furthermore, the nationalists not only were able to withstand the IC’s pressure, but they also knew how to take

advantage of its limitations, contradictions, and shortcomings in order to articulate, on the outskirts of the public sphere, the martyrological vision of Bosniak national victimhood in terms of religious victimhood, and, finally, openly introduce it onto the main commemorative stage in Potočari. In short, my analysis shows that nationalists in BiH never really lost their monopoly over the production and imposition of a legitimate vision of the social world. Sometimes they were simply less visible to the international audience.

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CRITICAL RE-ARCHIVING FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE AND INCLUSIVE MEMORIES OF THE YUGOSLAV WARS

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ABSTRACT

This chapter deals with the role of critical, self-reflexive re-archiving of records of violent pasts in preserving and challenging the memory of mass atrocities and wars. It reflects on our archival experiment within Vera and Donald Blinken Open Society Archives¹² Yugoslavia Archive Project, which involved the informed and immersive re-processing of television newscasts from the period preceding, during and immediately following the wars on the territory of the former Yugoslavia (1990-1996).

Keywords: *critical archival intervention, self-reflexive re-archiving, human rights, social justice, inclusive memory of war, right to truth, transparency, multivocality*

INTRODUCTION

Recent scholarship attributes prominent roles to archives in promoting social justice and creating collective memory. As concerns about social justice—broadly conceptualized and reflected in the representational outfit of an archive—are pertinent to archival practice as well, we posit that critical, self-reflexive re-archiving, as an archival intervention, is justified, indeed required, by the archival duty to respond to the right to truth of parties involved in warring pasts. It is within this duty that

¹² www.osaarchivum.org

we need to increase the transparency and accessibility of the records regarding their creators, subjects, and other reference points which may offer possibilities of performing those same records in different ways. Only in this way can we establish an archival environment in which narratives that challenge the dominant and meta-narratives about the Yugoslav Wars may be created, further serving communal recognition, through different memory practices, of the sufferings of war victims, whose roles and participation were either neglected, underrepresented, and misconceived, or were ideologically framed within dominant narratives.

In the first part of the chapter, we introduce the concept of *critical, self-reflexive re-archiving* and elaborate on the normative circumstances which justify its application to the archives of violent past(s) and wars. Then, we briefly summarize Blinken OSA's Yugoslavia Archive Project, while in the third part we demonstrate how the archival intervention put forth in the first part was applied within the project; explain its features; and explore its potential for creating alternative narratives of violent pasts. Lastly, we reflect on the challenges and limitations that we encountered when applying critical, self-reflexive re-archiving as a practice, and respond to some of the concerns that might arise as objections to its more general application.

CRITICAL, SELF-REFLEXIVE RE-ARCHIVING OF RECORDS OF VIOLENT PAST(S)

Recent archival and memory studies scholarship (Jimerson, 2006 and 2007; Harris, 2007; Duff et al, 2013; Halilovich, 2014 and 2016; and Viebach, 2021) attributes prominent roles to archives in promoting and supporting social (and transitional) justice through the creation of individual and collective (social) memory. Whether inspired by the “call of justice” (Harris, 2007) or the duty to remember, archives—especially those considered to be human rights or transitional archives—have a moral obligation (the ‘social conscience’ of archives) to be hospitable to victims of injustices and to include records and

voices of those oppressed and dominated. Beyond the availability and content of pertinent records, the process of archival knowledge formation in memory work is fundamentally influenced by the agency and decisions of the archivists. Archivists can mitigate “discrepancies in and abuses of power” (Geraci and Caswell, 2016), injustice and violence inherent in records because of the circumstances in which they were created (provenance, authorship); the nature of the archival workflow itself (appraisal, selection and description are not neutral activities but informed political choices); and the archivist’s personal engagement with the records. As Cook and Schwartz (2002) posited, “records emerging from the creation process are anything but neutral, organic, innocent residues of disinterested administrative transactions. Rather they are value-laden instruments of power”. Archivists may use their power (control) not only to select what gets preserved for posterity but also to determine how archives are accessed and used. They assign memory values to records in their care, favouring certain historical sources for knowledge and memory formation about past phenomena, events, groups, or individuals at the expense of others; therefore, as Wallace, quoting Iris Marion Young, reminds us, we archivists “are responsible in the present for how we narrate the past”. Archives thus become spaces of political and social struggle for “self-representation, narrative plurality, and rights seeking and promotion”. (Wallace, 2017)

Working with archives of violent past(s) and human rights abuses requires archivists “to read tacit narratives of power and knowledge” (Ketelaar, 2001) and to understand both the content of records included in and the underlying processes that led to the creation of those archives. Ideally, by fulfilling this requirement, archivists become sensitized to epistemic violence/harm that ensues from the process of record creation. In our current archival experiment with the documentary heritage of the 1991-1995 Yugoslav Wars and their aftermaths at Blinken OSA, we defined epistemic violence/harm as the (un)intentional limitation, obstruction, or denial of the possibility of knowledge formation on certain individuals, groups, or events in the

archives. We located and identified instances of underrepresentation, silencing, or obscuring of these record subjects and explored the possibilities for the archivist to address and rectify past injustices to the extent they are also inherent in the records. As concerns about social justice and inclusion—conceptualized and reflected in the representational outfit of archives—are pertinent to the archival practice as well, we strove to avoid reproducing social injustice in the archives by routinely following “unquestioned norms and habits” (Wallace, 2017) within the archival workflow. Instead, we introduced a critical, self-reflexive re-archiving method to recontextualize and mobilize (activate) selected records from the Yugoslavia Archive Project, 1948-2010 (hereinafter YAP) for human rights and social justice purposes, as a justified and morally required archival duty to respond to the right to truth claims of parties involved in narratives of contested, violent past(s). Our (counter)archival intervention, whose goal was to increase the transparency and accessibility of records regarding their creators, subjects, and other points of reference—and thus to enable future users to explore and perform those same records in diverse ways—was also informed by concepts of agency, gender and affect, and involved the rethinking of archival practices, curatorial methods, and modes of representation of the war documentation within the YAP.

For these purposes, we introduced “liberatory descriptions” of the archival content (Duff and Harris, 2002) to dissolve the epicentres of and decentralize record creation; embraced the diversity of voices (multivocality) in the records by focusing on those ignored or underrepresented, who are entitled to “shared standards of freedom, equality and respect” (Duff et al, 2013); and created multiple access points for meaningful, non-hierarchical user engagement and representation. At the same time, we conducted a self-ethnographic exploration to discover the emotional and behavioural landscape of “the individual archivist and the archivist as an individual” (Gilliland, 2015) throughout the re-archiving process. Rooted in our profound conviction that “the silent archivist is an archivist with no story to

tell” (Duff and Harris, 2002), the inclusion of our own voices in the archival narrative was an organic development of the experiment. We wanted to understand and record how intense emotional engagement (sympathy or identification, detachment, or rejection) with archives of violence, imagination, nostalgia, and speculation influenced our descriptive practices—descriptive metadata is as much the representation of the archivist as of the archival content itself—and the creation of new meanings. In our perception, this was the only morally acceptable way to establish a hospitable archival environment in which narratives challenging dominant discourses and meta-narratives about the 1991-1995 Yugoslav Wars could be created.

As we know from representatives of the records continuum model and postmodern theorists, records are never complete: they are “always in a process of becoming” (McKemmish, 1994) and “open into (and out of) the future” (Duff and Harris, 2002). Every interference, transaction, and exchange, including record creation and management by the *creator/donor*, selection, preservation, curation and contextualization by the *archivist* and critical analysis, evaluation and re-contextualization by the *user* reactivates the record for someone, for a new purpose. Writing on the semantic genealogies of archives, Ketelaar (2001) noted that “the archive is an infinite activation of the record. Each activation leaves fingerprints which are attributes to the archive’s infinite meaning”. Record creators, archivists and users are part of a “community of records” (Bastian, 2003), which encompasses the totality of records created through multiple societal actions by these actors, and which, at same time, provides a frame of interpretation in which those very records are read, conceived, and understood.

The inclusive and social justice sensitive archives emerging from this endeavour further serves as a means of redressing, through diverse memory practices performed in this very space, the damaged social status and low communal recognition of the sufferings of war victims, survivors and their relatives, whose agency was either

neglected, underrepresented, and misconceived, or ideologically framed within the dominant narratives. By including them in the archival description and context, these disempowered constituencies also gain recognition as equally credible sources (witnesses) to decisive historical events as the more powerful participants, which is, according to the alethic rights framework proposed by D'Agostini (2021), a way of fulfilling their right to truth. The inclusion of their names and places of existence (that is their stories) has the potential of bringing about the “localizing of transitional justice” (Viebach, 2021) through “local practices of memorialisation”, especially considering that, although the Dayton Peace accords brought military activities to an end, “the war over memory has only intensified and continues to be fought by other means”. (Halilovich, 2022) The multivocal archives may facilitate the creation of alternative narratives of human rights and suffering from a bottom-up perspective, likely to resist ethno-nationalist, dominant constructs of collective martyrdom and victimhood.

THE YUGOSLAVIA ARCHIVE PROJECT OF BLINKEN OSA

In the above theoretical context, the YAP at Blinken OSA (hereinafter the Archives) is a work in progress of professional outsider and cultural insider recordkeepers: an international group of archives professionals and graduate students in information science, nationalism studies, international relations, law and political science and theory coming from Hungary, as well as from the former Yugoslavia and the United States. We teamed to collect, activate and recontextualize records on changes in the historical, socio-political, economic, and cultural landscape in the Yugoslav region from the end of WWII to 2010, and present them in a novel, inclusive, and multivocal environment. In the vein of Duff and Harris (2002), who posited that the “peeling back of layers of interpretation and intervention is about context”, we have developed and applied a critical and self-reflexive archival processing methodology based on an enhanced metadata model and a self-

ethnographic scrutiny of the archival intervention and the agency of the archivist throughout it. It comprises over 35,000 texts, still- and moving image and sound records in multiple languages in analogue and digital format.

Initially conceived as the Balkan Archive, the YAP's aim was to assemble information on *all* records of the Archives on the ex-Yugo region into an encompassing collection that spans over various provenances, archival description levels, formats, and languages. Established in Budapest in the summer of 1995, the year that ended the wars in the countries on Hungary's southern borders, one of the strategic goals of the Archives was to document the history, dissolution, and afterlife of Yugoslavia through the acquisition of records from international organizations, human rights and philanthropic NGOs, media outlets and private persons. In a non-exhaustive inventory: the Records of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty's Research Institute, containing media monitoring and analytical material also on Yugoslavia was the first acquisition, in conjunction with the archives of the UN Expert Commission on Investigating War Crimes in the former Yugoslavia led by the legal scholar M. Cherif Bassiouni, which included testimonies, expert reports and audiovisual materials¹ on crimes against humanity and other serious war crimes. The Physicians for Human Rights' Bosnia Projects extensive collection of forensic evidence and exhumation and identification materials, as well as the video recordings of grave violations of human rights committed during the Yugoslav Wars from the International Monitor Institute², followed the path. The research collection of former war correspondent David Rohde on the fall of Srebrenica, including declassified US Department of State and United Nations communications and reports, and the photographs of

1 TV newscasts, raw footage and documentary films were analyzed, annotated and time-coded by the type of human rights abuses under international law, and readied for trial hearings by lawyers and students in law. However, the prepared materials never made it to the courtroom. On this, see Bassiouni's book entitled *Investigating War Crimes in the Former Yugoslavia War* (Intersentia, 2017).

2 The core material of this 1300-strong VHS set on the Balkans was collected under the aegis of the Bassiouni Commission.

the political scientist and human rights advocate Lara J. Nettelfield that resulted from her research work³ with the associations of the relatives of victims and survivors of the Srebrenica genocide also found their permanent repository at the Archives.

For the purposes of this chapter, we restricted our analysis to selected television monitoring materials (700 VHS tapes) covering the formative years (1991-1999) of post-Yugoslav statehood(s): analogue recordings of evening newscasts (“the first rough draft of history”, as the journalist Alan Barth famously wrote in 1943) and political programmes from public, central, and regional stations, as well as commercial and opposition channels from Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, and Serbia. Our choice was partly motivated by the complexities and difficulties of source analysis: audiovisual records of the recent, violent past narrated in the native language of the archivist, who had little or no direct experience with the examined historical events, which s/he had to describe according to a set methodological pattern in English. And, partly because “[...] visual evidence can present itself, not just as the objective witness of atrocity, but as a form of inquiry into the past that opens up a field of signification, memories, and counter-memories”. (Gómez-Barris, 2010)

As the YAP is also an archival research lab, we devised an experiment on addressing human rights and social justice claims through informed enhancement and innovative representation of metadata. As a first step, we collected descriptive metadata on records included in the YAP from the Archives’ disparate MS Access databases through semi-automated queries based on customized sets of simple and advanced keywords, taking into consideration the multilingual (mostly English, but also Hungarian, Polish, and Russian) aspect of our existing archival descriptions. Brought together in a common datasheet, we assessed the availability and level of granularity of the

3 See her book entitled *Courting Democracy in Bosnia and Herzegovina: The Hague Tribunal's Impact in a Postwar State* (Cambridge University Press, 2012).

metadata (*title and date of creation* in most cases) and complemented the existing schema with additional metadata as subjects of our (counter)archival intervention: *description/annotation*, *temporal*, and *spatial coverage* (locality level with geo-coordinates), and *subject headings* (on person, organization, event, and topic). We reprocessed and manually coded content to include themes, individuals, groups, organizations, and communities that have been traditionally under/misrepresented or entirely omitted, such as women, ethnic, religious, or sexual minorities, people with disabilities and microhistories of the ordinary. We added places outside the epicentres of political power to diversify geographies of record creation and representation. We further enriched metadata with keywords on corporate and personal names, topics, and events, as well as with internal notes, where interactions of archivists with records were documented to ensure transparency and accountability.

As we advanced with the coding of newscasts, and unanticipated situations emerged, our methodological approach had to be adjusted accordingly. The need to record our abundant internal discussions and reflections on the analysed content and our curatorial decisions led to the creation of an archival documentary film entitled *Room without a view*⁴, in which team members revealed their own strategic and affective approach to the sources they worked with. Their accounts gave an insight on how emotional engagement, imagination, speculation about gaps and silences in the records or nostalgia influenced and left identifiable personal imprints on the coding process. The film premiered at the international conference *Prime Time Nationalism*⁵ (2016), which we convened at the Archives to explore, with the help of media scholars, visual artists, filmmakers, lawyers, social anthropologists, and journalists the nature of politically controlled state televisions, and their role in shaping events, national identities, and political discourses, as well as

4 Available on Blinken OSA's YouTube channel.

5 The full recording of the conference proceedings is available on Blinken OSA's YouTube channel.

memory politics, genocide denial or reconciliation during and after the wars in the former Yugoslavia. At the same time, we were keen to learn more about their experiences in archiving, reusing, and re-contextualizing (and performing) TV broadcast archives and to get multidisciplinary feedback on our own work.

A further goal was to develop an online platform (to be launched in 2023) that allows for diversified, multiple access to and reveals the multivocality of the archival sources, while intuitive navigation puts relational patterns, interactions, and cross-references among them in a sharper focus. The pivotal elements of the YAP platform are the integrated search engine harvesting and filtering the enhanced metadata, and the user interface displaying search results simultaneously in a list and a multi-time layered map view, so that the geographic distribution of relevant records over changing historical periods and territories imminently becomes understandable. The enriched, value-added dataset will also be freely and openly available and downloadable for subsequent research and re-use from the YAP website.

Using the above methodology and approach to re-archiving sources of violent past(s), we managed to develop the YAP from an encompassing documentary collection into an arena of contestation, as we know from Ketelaar that archives are “not a storage technique but a space to escape from monolithic truths, history and memory” (2012). By diversifying voices and places, and presenting an alternative historical inquiry, we not only turned “a sense of responsibility into a practice of hospitality” (Harris, 2014) but we also paved the way for creating new meanings and narratives by every instance of using or reusing the records that may resist and contest dominant narratives and politically motivated constructs of the past. At the same time, we documented the (counter)archival intervention of the archivists and the impact of their personal affect and imagination on the archival description.

ARCHIVAL INTERVENTION IN PRACTICE

In addition to the endorsement of the human rights and social (and transitional) justice paradigm in archiving, one of the main epistemic premises of the YAP, as mentioned above is the claim that the archivist occupies a special place of epistemic power in our economies of knowledge-formation, reflected in the exercised archival influence over the processes of creation, preservation, and curation of records. This sort of archival power can have an ambiguous effect on the creation of archives: on the one hand there are aspects of the traditional archival practice which can result in suppression of the possibility for creating alternative narratives or memory practices, on the other hand, a reconceived archival practice can attach to the material various access points which can be used for developing different approaches and narratives of the events recorded. Both aspects of the archival power are probably best manifested in the archival practice of describing records, where due to the first one we can find instances of silenced or marginalized voices in the archives, while through the second we seek for various opportunities for their voicing.

As mentioned above, the YAP developed an archival theory and methodology which aims at guiding the archivist in achieving the latter and being constantly alert about the former. In this regard the YAP “equipped” the archivist with structural means or tools for archival intervention (in the form of enhanced and innovative descriptive metadata and the provision of a two-fold, free, descriptive syntax) which the archivist can use to intervene in the description of the material. The enhanced descriptive metadata we deployed in the description of the records was used for making *contextual archival interventions* while the two-fold, free descriptive syntax generated the opportunity for making *referential archival interventions*. Both types of interventions resulted in creating access points or signalling spaces in the archival description of the coded material which can be used for the creation of contesting narratives of the warring and the post-warring events in former Yugoslavia.

The first type of archival intervention, which we named “contextual archival intervention”, aims at embracing the multivocality of records and offering various points of contestation of narratives using three categories of the enhanced descriptive metadata set: the spatial coverage, the subject headings for persons, and the subject headings for organizations, events, topics. The multivocality of the records we worked on in the project can be conceived in different ways depending on the formal and content-based structure of the records. In the case of the television monitoring of prime-time newscasts from Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, and Serbia, from the war and the postwar years, the analysis of the multivocality resulted in distinguishing three types of voices: the one of the news anchors, the one of the reporters, and the accessed voices within the news programme. There were various instances during the processing of the newscast in which these three distinct voices offered not only different but also conflicting and/or silenced framing of the content, thus inviting a contextual archival intervention, to cope with their multivocality. In YAP we distinguish three sub-types of contextual archival intervention analogous to the three categories we use from the enhanced metadata set: place-based, person-based, and topic-based contextual archival intervention. Let us illustrate one such instance, namely of a topic-based contextual archival intervention from the processing of newscasts from the Bosnian television monitoring. A report on the newscasts from July 30, 1996, aired on TV BiH and the Independent Television Studio 99, informs about the opening of the Sarajevo-Ploče railways, after 4 years of stoppage due to the war. Alija Izetbegović, former President of Bosnia and Herzegovina, speaks on the footage and termed this the “second opening of Sarajevo towards the world”, while the news anchors and the reporters stressed the political importance of the opening of the rails as well. However, the several minute long reports on both television broadcasts also included various interviews with people present on the event and people who travelled with the first train to mark the opening of the rail. While neither the news anchor nor the reporters paid justice to their statements, framing them mainly within the political discourse

characteristic for the first year of the post-war period in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the archivist, by embracing the enhanced descriptive metadata categories at stake, was able to report on the silencing of these voices in the framing of these reports. The statements by the people who were the first passengers on the newly opened train line about the Yugoslav past, how they used to travel in Yugoslavia, the summers on the Adriatic before the war, which were (unintentionally?) suppressed by the framing voices in the newscasts, were voiced by the archivist through the coding and the assignment of specific keywords belonging to the enhanced metadata categories mentioned above, which were thus used to signal early expressions of Yugo-nostalgia, among the accessed voices, providing thus a platform for different interpretations of the reported event.

The referential archival interventions, unlike the contextual ones, aim at using the features of the adopted two-fold, free syntax of an archival description to signal the controversial reference status of some terms or claims which are pertinent to some of the voices appearing in the newscasts. In the wartime newscasts that were processed within the YAP it was a commonality to encounter stigmatization of national and ethnic groups, use of hate speech, denigrating terms, false news, and historical falsifications. To remain faithful to the controversial content made accessible through one's processing, the archivist referentially intervened in the archival description using the two-fold free descriptive syntax at his/her disposal. One manifestation of this use can be found in the endorsement of direct speech by the archivist in describing the content of the material, which is far from common for archival descriptions. For instance, various instances of hate speech or openly inciting ethnic hatred present in the framing voices or the accessed voices in the newscasts, were used, where unavoidable, for description of the content in quotation marks, next to the person's name who uttered them. This allowed the archivist on the one hand to refrain from making judgment on the content, while on the other hand, through this withdrawal, to signal that the described content has a controversial status in some regards which

are left to the researcher to investigate further by consulting the respective material. Similar intervention can be encountered in respect of the use of denigrating, historically misplaced reference terms to describe individuals or groups as parties in the Yugoslav wars (“Ustasha”, “Chetniks”, “Crnokošuljaši”, etc.) which can frequently be found in the framing, reporters’, and accessed voices on the wartime newscasts on all television stations included in the YAP television monitoring.

CHALLENGES AND LIMITATIONS

The development of a critical and self-reflexive archival methodology was not a process which in its entirety preceded the actual processing of the newscasts within the television monitoring. Although the foundations of the YAP archival methodology were established during the project creation, some of its central aspects were only conceptualized during the actual processing of the collections, while others, which were initially conceived, got modified and expanded according to the processing circumstances. And while the project in this way perpetuated a culture of constant knowledge-development—not only in archival, but also in a historical sense as well—the methodology deployed showed several limitations on the processing outcomes. Two such limitations are of special relevance for the archival description of the newscasts. The first was reflected on the descriptive outcome, as a side effect of the archivist’s interpretative engagement during the processing of the newscasts, while the second one was related to the reasonable level of indeterminacy of the description of the newscasts which, however, pointed out limitations of the possibilities of the search engine and the visual representation of the database.

In working on the methodology of the project, we were conscious of the fact that the interpretative activity of the archivist partly constitutes the record one is describing, and that this interpretative

apparatus of the archivist is also something to be occasionally recorded in the enhanced descriptive metadata categories, to provide an insight into the point of view from which certain archival descriptions were made. Personal histories, institutional cultures, gender dynamics, class relations, and many other dimensions of meaning construction are always already at play in processes of records description. Obviously, we cannot, nor did we want to, completely factor out the archivist's preliminary conceptions or prejudices. However, the different understanding, projection and anticipation of the newscasts processed within the television monitoring, resulted in different depths of the archival descriptions created, not only in comparative terms, between the different archivists who worked on the monitoring, but also within the archival descriptions produced by the same archivist.

The main reasons for the "depth difference" of the archival descriptions we find in the interpretational engagement of the archivist with the material itself, where several factors proved to be detrimental. The first factor was the familiarity of the archivists with the material processed. Namely, there were many instances in which the archivist was not familiar with the events prior to their processing, so s/he made a minimal projection on their meaning, which as s/he gained more information about the event from upcoming newscasts, changed in their later engagement and expanded. The continuously acquired knowledge about the historical importance of the events which the archivist described also resulted in increased depth of the description. How familiarity with the events described, as a factor, influenced the depth of the archival description can best be seen from the sequential description of events present in the records by the same archivist. For instance, while the archivist seems to be projecting only a general understanding of certain events such as the anti-war and anti-establishment protests in Belgrade in 1991, at the first appearance of reports about these events in the newscasts, by the processing of the next two weeks of these events, the description of the same events considerably evolves, conveying a

much more detailed presentation of the protests. Hence, the archival descriptions of these news reports vary from “Protests in Belgrade” to more in-depth descriptions which include individuals who spoke on the protests, references to number of attendees or the demands of the protesters.

Although we applied a non-linear and geo-temporally simultaneous archiving method, the lapse of time proved to be another factor contributing to the different descriptive depth and versions of the same visual material. If the archivist encountered news events for the first time, the initial description that s/he created may differ from later ones resulting from subsequent viewings of the same news, especially if these were also reported on other or “enemy” channels. Also, if the archivist revisited descriptions recorded instantly during viewing with additional knowledge and impressions on other parts of the collection, the modified annotation may be more detached from the material itself than during the first visual encounter.

The different interpretational engagement of the archivists with the material was also reflected on the level of extension of keywords usage, where the factor contributing to the difference seems to be not primarily the familiarity with the issues described but rather the sensitivity, the interests, and the attitude of the archivist towards the issues reported in the newscasts. This became visible only after closing the data entry phase for certain record series where we noted the presence of different interpretations of a socially sensitive, human rights vocabulary by the processing archivists as well as the more extensive usage of topic-specific keywords in the description of some issues rather than others. Thus, while some of the team members were more extensively describing economic and political issues, in accordance with their background, affinities and sensitivities, others expanded the references to women, minorities and socially disadvantaged groups in the descriptions. And there were archivists, who searched and included in the description positive accomplishments from the common past in Yugoslavia, as well as elements of its continuity in the post-war years, and those

who stressed aspects of the enmity and diabolization of the other during the warring period.

The second limitation of the methodology ensues from a general policy about the granularity of the description, which was practically decided before the start of the project, and the interplay of this policy with the representation of the data from the enhanced metadata set. For instance, within the monitoring of television stations from Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, and Serbia the description level was set on the respective newscast programmes where each of the news appearing on the programme was described by the archivist. Consequently, data for all the enhanced metadata sets was collected on the same level, such as, localities with geo-coordinates for the spatial coverage category of the metadata. However, although both the news description and the recorded localities accurately refer to the content processed, it is undetermined which localities refer exactly to which news described. Researchers of the database can only acquire such insight once the whole programme has been consulted rather than have an a priori access to such information provided by the archivist. This indeterminacy posed various limitations on the possibilities of the search engine, as well as on the visual representation of the database, which had to take a less precise, holistic, approach in representing the data.

OPENING INTO THE FUTURE

Beside the challenges we encountered from the outcome and the representational limitations, the rich-texture database resulting from the YAP, as well as the online platform to be launched represent a unique archival experiment, which made a major contribution to the increased visibility and accessibility of the Archive's Yugoslavia related collections. Although the YAP platform to be launched in 2023 will be the ultimate project outcome which will significantly reflect the features of this archival experiment, the YAP produced

an immense body of additional internal materials, including semi-structured individual audio interviews with the archivists working on the project, raw footage, archival diaries, and other notes left by archivists. Further analytical and methodological engagement with these complementary sources will yield more in-depth knowledge not only about YAP as an archival experiment but also about archival and meta-archival matters that structure and advance archival theory and practice in general.

There is no disagreement among the team members that in terms of future uses the YAP platform should be expanded to include community and personal archives to further diversify voices that articulate stories of injustice, oppression, and violence. Affected communities, concerned private persons should be able to add relevant and complementing materials, as well as to download documents of various provenances and the pertinent metadata. This bi-directional exchange would be beneficial for both the YAP and the constituencies interacting with it, as the former would be enriched by records missing from its collections, such as personal photos, correspondence, or even digital copies of material objects, while the latter could acquire institutional archival sources that have previously been inaccessible for them. As transitional archive, the YAP will be also open for other transformations in time and space, and “between institutional, performative and cultural layers” (Viebach, 2021).

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For a society to heal from the wounds of the past, it has to recognize those wounds, understand the reasons that caused them, and then properly deal with them. Leaving the wounds in oblivion does not contribute to a substantial solution to the problems that caused them in the first place. More than twenty years after the conflict it is the right time to start (or continue) talking about those wounds in order to be able to really move forward.

Dr. Darko Leitner-Stojanov, Institute for Habsburg and Balkan Studies, Austrian Academy of Sciences

This edited volume on cultural memory and conflict legacy brings together a variety of academic and activist perspectives on a crucial point from recent Macedonian history: the armed conflict of 2001. With an excellent international team of authors, they set upon understanding and revealing the multiplicity of the remembrance culture in today's North Macedonia and beyond.

Prof. Dr. Veli Kreci, Faculty of Contemporary Social Sciences, South East European University

This edited volume presents a great academic investigation of the determinants of the 2001 conflict and its nature, as well as its persistence in form of memories in society. Additionally, the volume demonstrates, with academic rigor, the unintended consequences of peace intervention in the country and in the wider region. Hence, it significantly contributes to a better understanding of how the conflicting remembrance, intertwined with public discourses, has enabled divisive factors into the area of interethnic relations.

Prof. Dr. Nenad Markovikj, Institute for Political Sciences and Media and Communication, Faculty of Law Iustinianus Primus, University of "Ss. Cyril and Methodius"

The volume offers not just an insight into the phenomenon of conflict remembrance, but it also boldly criticizes the process of reconciliation and the creation of parallel conflicting discourses on the conflict in 2001, and gives the reader a possibility to reveal the unpleasant truth of the post-2001 political developments related to politics of remembrance. The contribution of the other authors in this volume is nothing short of excellent.

Prof. Dr. Ljupčo S. Risteski, Institute of Ethnology and Anthropology, Faculty of Natural Sciences, University of "Ss. Cyril and Methodius"

The moment the interethnic tensions between the Macedonians and the Albanians in North Macedonia arise, we recall, as a bad dream, the 2001 conflict. The edited volume and the research project behind it actualize the role of the memories of the 2001 conflict in this context and shed light on the commemorative dynamics and processes of (re)creating narratives about it.