

7 Sarajevo's Markers of Memory

Contestations and Solidarities in a Post-War City

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Introduction¹

On 6 April 2012, the city of Sarajevo and its citizens prepared for a day of remembrance to commemorate the start of the siege of the capital of Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH)² twenty years earlier. 11,541 plastic empty red chairs were lined up in the city's main street as a reminder of those who were killed during the war between 1992 and 1995 in BiH. A special area was reserved for smaller chairs honoring the children who were killed during the siege. Thousands of Sarajevans walked along the 'Sarajevo red line' of almost a kilometer, placing flowers on the chairs. They remembered the war collectively and shared their grief and sorrow in public during this powerful and emotional gathering.

During the siege, which lasted more than three and a half years, between 11,000 and 15,000³ people lost their lives and many were forced to flee the city. The city, surrounded by sloping hills with endless rows of gravestones, became scattered with pockmarked walls and gaping grenade holes as reminders of the intensive violence. Aside from the urgent need to repair the tremendous material and infrastructural damage to the city and its

¹ This article is based on material collected during fieldwork conducted between June and September 2011, resulting in my Master's thesis 'Sarajevo's legacy of war. War memorials in the city and contested identities among the young' (May 2012, University of Amsterdam). Fieldwork consisted of participant observation at commemorative ceremonies and interviews with representatives of victim associations, NGOs, activists and twenty (young) people living in Sarajevo and Istočno Sarajevo [East-Sarajevo]. These interviewees remain anonymous, as the focus of this chapter on public remembrance cannot do justice to each of their individual stories. I thank all interviewees for their valuable input as well as Lamija Landžo, Valerie Hopkins, Wouter Reitsema and Ton Zwaan for their intellectual and editorial support. All interpretations are my own. Contact details author: L.A.Boerhout@uva.nl

² Hereafter referred to as BiH (Bosna i Hercegovina).

³ These statistics are based on findings of the Research and Documentation Center in Sarajevo (RDC), but the numbers depend on whether pre-war Sarajevan territory is included in the calculations or not. The entire death toll in BiH ranges from approximately 97,000 (according to the RDC) to approximately 105,000 (according to the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia).

cultural heritage,⁴ Sarajevans themselves (just like all Bosnians)⁵ needed to rebuild their lives. This happened in a post-war climate filled with a wide variety of memory narratives disputing the start of the war, its terminology, issues of responsibility, and what and how to remember.⁶

Such contested and often politicized narratives also surrounded the ceremony of 6 April 2012. The fact that the organizers purchased the red chairs from a factory in neighboring Serbia sparked off fierce resistance from victim associations, given Serbia's share in the war. At the same time, a deliberate choice was made to exclude victims outside of the besieged territory and to commemorate only those who were killed within the siege. Finally, the presence at the ceremony of the international community – blamed for their lack of support during the war – was also disputed. These contestations show how individual memories over the years have been transformed into more tangible and public acts of remembrance that reveal as much about present-day power relations as they do about Sarajevo's wartime history.

In this chapter I will focus on the public articulation of memory narratives in Sarajevo's post-war memorial⁷ landscape related to the war in the 1990s.⁸ Sarajevo's 'cultural memory'⁹ reveals both contestations and solidarities in

4 One of the major landmarks in the city, the National Library (*Vijećnica*), was burned down in 1992, destroying over 2 million books, and was only opened after renovation in May 2014. Robert Donia, *Sarajevo. A biography* (UK: Hurst and Co., 2006), 314.

5 By Bosnians, I mean all the people living in the territory of Bosnia and Herzegovina, regardless of their background and self-identification. The same applies to Sarajevans.

6 For an overview of the various memory narratives in BiH, see Nicolas Moll, "Fragmented memories in a fragmented country: memory competition and political identity-building in today's Bosnia and Herzegovina," *Nationalities Papers: The Journal of Nationalism and Ethnicity* 41:6 (2011).

7 I follow James Young who sees memorials as all the commemorative, tangible and intangible, practices that are part of the public culture of remembrance. James E. Young, *The Texture of Memory. Holocaust Memorials and Meaning* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1993), 4.

8 Within the scope of this chapter, I will not be able to focus on all existing initiatives nor on the ties with processes of memorialization related to the other Yugoslav wars in the 1990s or in (neighboring) countries, nor on the influence of memorializing the Second World War in BiH. See, for example, Moll, "Fragmented memories" and Hariz Halilovich, *Places of Pain. Forced Displacement, Popular Memory and Trans-local identities in Bosnian war-torn communities* (New York: Berghahn, 2013). An excellent work with ethnographies in post-war BiH is Xavier Bougarel, Elissa Helms and Ger Duijzings, *The new Bosnian mosaic. Identities, memories and moral claims in a post-war society* (Farnham: Ashgate Publishing, 2007).

9 *Cultural memory* embodies oral and material aspects and is 'always shared with the help of symbolic artefacts that mediate between individuals and, in the process, create communality across both time and space'. Astrid Erll and Ann Rigney (eds.), *Mediation, Remediation and the Dynamics of Cultural Memory* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2009), 1.

the struggle over memory and recognition following different agendas in Sarajevo's 'commemorative arena'.¹⁰ Notwithstanding the dominance of the government-sponsored narrative in Sarajevo, politicians are not the only facilitator of cultural memory.¹¹ I will therefore not only outline the hegemonic narratives, but also explore how various non-institutionalized actors have produced alternative and creative knowledge to counter dominant remembrance practices. This exchange and opposition between different actors make memory and remembrance subject to constant change and negotiation, as it not 'owned' by a specific group and does not operate as a fixed entity.¹² Contested memory narratives of war are, of course, not exclusively 'Bosnian' or 'Sarajevan'; they are inherent to the complex issue of remembering war and conflict all around the world. This chapter therefore aims to give local insight into the multi-layered dynamics of memorialization issues. I will first focus on the role of the Sarajevo government before moving on to initiatives spearheaded by victim associations and several activists and artists, illustrating these remembrance practices with the personal perceptions of several young Sarajevans.

Post-War Socio-Political Climate

After the Dayton Peace Agreement ended the war in late 1995, BiH was confronted with an extensive set of problems related to its constitution and political culture. To begin with, BiH's first post-war elections saw no real regime change, and nationalist politicians continued to be unwilling to govern the country together, let alone reconcile. Second, BiH's peace agreement effectively institutionalized the ethno-national divisions that had been exacerbated during the war. The Dayton Agreement split the territory into two semi-autonomous entities headed by a weak central government: the Bosnian Serb-dominated *Republika Srpska* (RS) and the mainly Bosniak/Bosnian-Croat-dominated *Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina* (FBiH).¹³

10 Timothy G. Ashplant, Graham Dawson and Michael Roper, eds., *Commemorating war. The politics of identity* (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 2004), 19–20.

11 Astrid Erll, *Memory in Culture* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011).

12 Michael Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory. Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization* (Stanford 2009).

13 In BiH, private notions of national and ethnic belonging are blurred. Politically speaking, the divisions between the different categories are dominant and presented as fixed, focusing on three main categories of ethno-national identification: Bosniak, Bosnian Croat, Bosnian Serb (sometimes overlapping with the religious identification of Catholic, Orthodox and Muslim

Since most power is located at the entity level and both entities stand in opposition to each other, this power vacuum and geographical segregation of largely ethno-national homogeneous communities have resulted in enormous economic, institutional, and social problems. Third, the existence of the state BiH as such continues to be challenged by the Bosnian-Serb elite in the RS and to a lesser extent by Bosnian-Croats.¹⁴ Generally speaking, it became acceptable in the public sphere of BiH to spread distrust and fear of the 'Other' based upon wartime rhetoric, leaving oppositional and non-nationalist voices marginalized in the public debate, the media, and education.¹⁵

Given this repressive socio-political climate and the intensive process of nation-building and 'imagining communities',¹⁶ monuments have served merely as a source of division rather than as a unifying story of, for instance, collective victimhood. In BiH, no uniform national strategy on public remembrance has been agreed upon, leaving room for multiple interpretations on what happened and how to remember. As a result, local decision-makers in each entity have the power to determine which

respectively; depending on personal viewpoints) identifications. In 1993, the term 'Bosniak' became the new official designation in the constitution to refer to Bosnian Muslims. After Yugoslavia ceased to exist, no umbrella identification, such as 'Bosnian-Herzegovinian' has been institutionalized in BiH including all citizens on the territory of BiH, even though there are people that continue to identify this way. In the Dayton Peace Agreement, Bosniaks, Bosnian-Serbs and Bosnian-Croats became recognized as the three 'constituent peoples' that are recognized politically. A fourth category of undefined 'Others' also exists (including minority identities, such as Roma and Jews) but cannot be elected into office as such and are not recognized equally in the constitution. This discriminatory policy violates minority rights (see, for example, the famous Sejdić-Finci case at the European Court of Human Rights) and solidified possible identifications in public debate, economic life and academic research. For this research I tried to stay as close to the way people or organizations self-identified during their interviews. For more on identifications in post-war BiH, see Bougarel, Helms and Duijzings, *The new Bosnian mosaic. Identities, memories and moral claims in a post-war society* (2007).

14 Examples are numerous, such as the statement by the president of the RS, Milorad Dodik, announcing that he would organize a referendum hinting at secession. See International Crisis Group, 'Bosnia: State Institutions under Attack' (2011).

15 On media, see for example: Lejla Turčilo, 'Bosnia's Media Truly Reflects Its Divided Society,' *Balkan Insight*, November 29, 2010. On education, see for example: Pilvi Torsti, "Divergent Stories, Convergent Attitude Study on the Presence of History, History Textbooks, and the Thinking of Youth in post-War Bosnia and Herzegovina" (PhD diss., University of Helsinki, 2003) and Clare McGill, 'Education and fragility in Bosnia and Herzegovina' *Research papers UNESCO* (International Institute for Educational Planning, 2010). An infamous example is the 'two schools under one roof' system where students with different backgrounds attend the same school building while being physically separated and taught from different (history) textbooks.

16 Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities. Reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983).

memorials receive funding, and it became the norm for victim associations trying to establish a monument in a community where they are part of the minority to encounter political obstructions. This does not mean, however, that the political elite completely dictates the memorial landscape. There are in fact local varieties and a marginalized but consistent production of counter-memories in each entity, supported by the work of investigative journalists, youth activists, and networks of victim associations.¹⁷

The existence of resistance against the nationalist hegemonic narratives is particularly visible in Sarajevo as the urban capital but also as a city that has always been praised for its multicultural and tolerant character (particularly with regard to religions).¹⁸ Many Sarajevans often (nostalgically) describe the peaceful co-existence within the city prior to the war. As the city was besieged, this cosmopolitan identification was challenged, and ('mixed') relationships were put to the test. And yet the so-called 'Sarajevan spirit' helped to sustain the belief that progressive urbanites – regardless of their background – could together resist the attack on their multinational city by nationalists.¹⁹

However, this makeup of the city changed dramatically due to the exodus of at least half of the pre-war inhabitants at the start of the war, mainly Bosnian-Serbs, while an almost equal number of people from villages in Eastern BiH fleeing from the VRS Army sought refuge in Sarajevo.²⁰ The war thus greatly altered the composition of Sarajevo's population, and the pre-war territory of the city was literally split along an 'inter-entity boundary line' – a division that continues to this day. Sarajevo became part of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, while Istočno Sarajevo [East-Sarajevo], became part of the Republika Srpska. These effects of the war explain how various – competing – memory narratives became connected to Sarajevo's post-war landscape, illustrated by the story of the first monument in Sarajevo.

17 See Nicolas Moll, "Division and Denial and Nothing Else? Culture of History and Memory Politics in Bosnia and Herzegovina," *Cultures of History Forum*, Imre Kertész Kolleg University Jena (April 2015).

18 Rusmir Mahmutćehajić, *Bosnia the good. Tolerance and Tradition* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2000), 46. Sarajevans indeed identified relatively often as Yugoslavs (in contrast with other Yugoslav cities or more rural areas) and had a high proportion of 'mixed' marriages. Fran Markowitz, *Sarajevo: A Bosnian Kaleidoscope* (Urbana, Chicago and Springfield: University of Illinois Press, 2010), 13, 79.

19 Ivana Maček, *Sarajevo under siege. Anthropology in wartime* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009), 119.

20 Robert Donia, *Sarajevo. A biography* (2006), 314.

Suada's Site of Memory

It was the 5th of April 1992. Morning. City of Sarajevo. In front of the Assembly building of RBiH [Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina] thousands of people already gathered, including most of the youth. Below are the flags, pictures of Tito, banners with phrases 'We are for peace.' Morning is slowly becoming noon and Vrbanja bridge is already shaking under the weight of people. A few minutes later, shots were fired. Two bodies lay frozen on the sidewalk. Both women. Evening of the 5th of April. Newspapers, TV and radio stations report on the demonstrations and every one of them points out that the FIRST victim fell on Vrbanja bridge – Suada Dilberović.²¹

In April 1996, the government of Sarajevo revealed a memorial plaque on the railings of the Vrbanja bridge to commemorate the place where the alleged first victim of the war was killed in one of Sarajevo's anti-war demonstrations. The bridge was renamed after Suada Dilberović, and the inscription reads poetically that the river *Bosna* will not dry up as long as a drop of her blood continues to flow. Yet the other woman who died there that day on the sidewalk was not mentioned. Olga Sučić was all but forgotten.

A Sarajevan woman tried to explain to me why she thinks Olga is not remembered as much as Suada is. 'I don't know who that is. But perhaps [because] she's Olga, because Suada is really a Bosnian name. Suada is kind of ours. Olga, I don't know where she is from.'²² Another young Sarajevan man was more straightforward in his reaction, saying: 'Both died for the same reason. The only problem is that she [Olga] was a Serb',²³ adding that he rejected the fact that the government 'forgot' to mention Olga. Interestingly enough, although Suada is perceived by some as 'kind of ours', she comes originally from Croatia and was a student in Sarajevo. Her name reveals a Bosniak/Muslim connotation. Olga, on the other hand, was a somewhat older mother who worked for the government in BiH. Her name is commonly seen as Serb or Croat. The labels for both of these women obviously say nothing about their self-identifications, but it does raise the question of why the government selected Suada as their symbolic first victim.

21 Brief reproduction of a translated story in a Bosnian news weekly. Snjezana Mulić-Bušatlija, 'Trči, Nora, trči! O mostu, Suadi i Olgi...' [Run, Nora, run! About the bridge, Suada and Olga.] *Dani*, 5 April 2002.

22 Interview by author, Sarajevo, summer 2011.

23 Ibid.

Every monument communicates certain values that the initiator deems worthy of sharing with its audience. It is not a coincidence that the government of Sarajevo specifically chose this young, innocent woman as a symbol of (national) suffering, as it suited the formation of a post-war narrative of exclusive identification and victimhood, in this case supporting Bosniak nation-building. Within this framework, there is little room for the suffering of those considered to be Bosnian-Serb or Bosnian-Croat, even though they might have been citizens of Sarajevo – as in Olga's case. By means of selective remembering and strategic forgetting, the history of what occurred at the bridge was being rewritten to serve present needs of reconstructing a collective narrative of identification. But Olga was not entirely forgotten. Years later, together with relatives of the deceased, a journalist was to demand that Olga's name be added to the plaque. They were able to convince the government to correct the story, and a new plaque was revealed in 2001 mentioning both names of the alleged first victims.²⁴ This snapshot reveals the ever-changing nature of memorials and the ability of individuals to exercise their power in producing oppositional knowledge. The selective narrative of the government continues to linger in the public sphere, however, as the bridge continues to be commonly referred to as the Suada Dilberović bridge.

Sarajevo's Government: Honoring the Fallen Soldiers

The example of Suada's bridge shows how the government plays a key role in shaping remembrance practices, as it is the major decision-maker and often has the greatest access to (financial) resources.²⁵ With the majority of Sarajevo's citizens voting for Bosniak nationalist parties,²⁶ it is important to shed light on the construction of their narrative. After the (Bosnian) Serb and (Bosnian) Croat elite began to flex their nationalist muscles in the 1980s and 1990s and following the devastating war years, the Bosniak elite also embarked on an intensive process of nation-building.²⁷ After the war, one of the first steps supporting this process was the renaming of almost half

24 Obviously, as several people pointed out to me, before these two women there had been victims of violence who never received attention due to factors such as their assumed ethno-national background or gender.

25 Paul Connerton, *How societies remember* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 3.

26 Donia, *Sarajevo. A biography*, 342-349.

27 Ger Duijzings, 'Commemorating Srebrenica,' in Bougarel, Helms and Duijzings, *The new Bosnian mosaic. Identities, memories and moral claims in a post-war society* (2007), 150.

of the streets in the city of Sarajevo. Many non-Muslim and communist figures and events were removed, while the Osman legacy of the city was highlighted.²⁸ These attempts clearly reveal a form of 'organised forgetting',²⁹ by means of emphasizing the distinctiveness of the Bosniak nation.

This establishment of a strong military narrative was also reflected in the various memorials established by the Ministry of Veteran Affairs of the FBiH, with up to 150 cemeteries for fallen soldiers who fought in the Bosnian army (ARBiH) and almost 800 memorials spread throughout the city.³⁰ However, the location of the plaques did not always correspond with the place where these soldiers lost their lives, and some of the soldiers listed clearly have questionable reputations, being linked to possible war crimes.³¹ These issues reveal that the aim of the government is not only to honor those who died but to also have these memorials serve as a legitimization of the exclusivist narrative of nationalist parties. In Sarajevo's case, for example, unwelcome facts about crimes committed by the ARBiH against are often downplayed.³² By avoiding this type of moral responsibility, a black-and-white picture is presented of who is the victim and who is the perpetrator, while in practice several soldiers in the ARBiH fought for a multinational BiH and identified themselves in a wide variety of ways.

A few years ago, however, a counter-initiative was announced. In 2011, a politician from the non-nationalist Social Democratic Party (SDP) initiated a monument to commemorate the victims – mainly Bosnian-Serbs from

28 Guy M. Robinson, Sten Engelstoft and Alma Pabrić, 'Remaking Sarajevo. Bosnian nationalism after the Dayton Accord' *Political Geography* 20:8 (November 2011) 966–970.

29 Connerton, *How societies remember*, 14.

30 Xavier Bougarel, 'Death and the Nationalist. Martyrdom, War Memory and Veteran Identity among Bosnian Muslims,' in Bougarel, Helms and Duijzings, *The new Bosnian mosaic. Identities, memories and moral claims in a post-war society* (2007), 172. It was no coincidence that the Ministry of Veteran Affairs gained so much control over the process of memorialization. With about two-thirds of the adult male population being veterans, they became a politically interesting group to secure votes from, although these veterans should not be considered a homogenous group with a clear-cut Bosniak identification. *Ibid.*: 167, 190–191. It is also important to point out that male veterans receive a relatively large share of the allocation of social benefits compared to female civilian victims of war and rape; see 'Whose Justice? The women of Bosnia and Herzegovina are still waiting,' (London: Amnesty International Publications, 2009), 41.

31 'Criteria for School Names and Symbols. Implementation Report,' *OSCE Mission to Bosnia and Herzegovina* (2007), 3. On the initiative of the OSCE, many schools in both entities had to erase offensive names, such as local war heroes suspected of war crimes, but this has yet to be fully implemented. Author's written correspondence with political officer of OSCE Tuzla, summer 2011.

32 Eldin Hadžović, 'Sarajevo Shuns Recognition of Bosniak War Crimes,' *Balkan Insight*, 23 December 2011.

Sarajevo – who were executed and thrown into the infamous *Kazani* pit by a brigade of the ARBiH near Sarajevo. The role of the brigade and its leader, Mušan ‘Caco’ Topalović, is heavily contested, with some glorifying his part in the war and others vehemently rejecting him.³³ The SDP politician publicly condemned the actions by Topalović’s brigade, emphasizing that these soldiers ‘did the very same thing as those who were surrounding us’.³⁴ Such a monument would have been the first honoring the death of victims for which the ARBiH was responsible, but to this very day the monument has not been established.³⁵ In the meantime, several journalists and individuals started to raise awareness about the commemorations that told a one-sided story. In 2014, the Sarajevo history teacher Haris Jusufović dared to speak out on behalf of those killed by the ARBiH, writing: ‘we have to face the skeletons from our past in order to have a future’.³⁶ His attempt to call attention to stories about the fate of Bosnian-Serbs in Sarajevo became the topic of a documentary. These individual initiatives in arts and journalism, however marginalized, show the potential for civil society to open up the selective commemorative narrative of the government.

Sarajevo’s Government: Blaming the Perpetrator

Another example of a contested site commemorates one of the largest massacres at an outdoor market in the center of Sarajevo. On 5 February 1994, mortar shells were fired by the army of the Republika Srpska (VRS), killing 68 persons and wounding 144 more.³⁷ Tucked away behind the fruit and vegetable stands at the bustling *Markale* market, a large red glass wall lists the names of the victims with a white memorial board that reads: ‘On this spot Serbian criminals on 5.2.1994 killed 67 citizens of Sarajevo’, followed

33 For a detailed study on this topic, see Nicolas Moll, “Sarajevska najpoznatija javna tajna”: Suočavanje sa Cacom, Kazanima i zločinima počinjenim nad Srbima u opkoljenom Sarajevu, od rata do 2015. *Friedrich Eberhard Stiftung* (2015).

34 Hadžović, ‘Sarajevo Shuns Recognition’.

35 ‘Sarajevska podrška spomen-obilježju na Kazanimam’ [Sarajevo supports the memorial at Kazani], *Radiosarajevo.ba*, 5 March 2012.

36 Haris Jusufović as quoted in Nidzara Ahmetašević, “NEMA ALI: Sarajevo se mora suočiti s “vlastitim” zločinima [Sarajevo must face “own” crimes],” *Slobodna Bosna*, 1 April 2015. His story builds upon the work of several investigative journalists who have been concerned with this topic since the end of the war.

37 Donia, *Sarajevo*, 327.

by an Islamic verse.³⁸ The site, which was hit a second time in August 1995, is full of painful memories and considered to be a very important place of remembrance in the city.

A closer look at the text of the memorial shows that besides a sincere mourning of those who were murdered by the grenades, the government decided to mention the perpetrator in an unambiguous way. The text on the memorial board urges citizens never to forget who caused their grief, and instead of holding the army or specific perpetrators responsible, it blames and condemns the entire Serbian nation.³⁹ In the context of BiH's post-war climate, this reveals a polarizing message along ethno-national lines clearly separating 'us' from 'them', comparable with narratives apparent in the media and in public debates all over the region during and following the disintegration of Yugoslavia.⁴⁰

In 2011, the then mayor of Sarajevo, Alija Behmen, a member of the non-nationalist Social Democratic Party (SDP), reacted with surprise when confronted with the text during an interview. He responded that he had never seen the text and that he rejected its phrasing.⁴¹ Since he attends the commemorations frequently, it is rather unlikely that he did not know of the phrasing. In a later interview, he emphasized that Bosnian-Serbs were also victims during the siege in Sarajevo, using the variety of names on the monument of the Markale massacre as proof that all Sarajevans were exposed to grenades and snipers.⁴² Indeed, it is a fact that grenades killed indiscriminately and that all people suffered enormously in besieged Sarajevo, regardless of their background. But why does the government emphasize that Bosnian-Serbs were victims as well during the war in Sarajevo while at the same time allowing a monument to serve as a warning signal against the entire Serbian nation?

The problem again is the difficulty of trying to uphold a black-and-white, victim-and-perpetrator binary, especially when these cannot be easily

38 This standardized text can be read on all governmental commemorative plaques that mark massacre sites in the city.

39 The ICTY sentenced various commanders of the Bosnian-Serb VRS army, such as Stanislav Galić and Dragomir Milošević, for their responsibility in crimes against civilians in besieged Sarajevo.

40 Sabrina P. Ramet, "The Dissolution of Yugoslavia: Competing Narratives of Resentment and Blame," *Southeast Europe. Journal of Politics and Society* No. 1 (2007).

41 'Na ovom mjestu su srpski zločinci ubili 67 građana Sarajeva [On this spot Serbian criminals killed 67 citizens of Sarajevo],' *DEPO*, 18 January 2011.

42 F. Vele, 'Nova inicijativa za izgradnju spomenika artiljercima i snajperistima koji su pucali na Sarajlije [A new initiative to build a monument for artilleryists and snipers who shot at Sarajevans],' *Dnevni Avaz*, 5 May 2011.

drawn along supposedly 'neat' ethno-national lines, such as in Sarajevo. The capital was heavily and systematically attacked by the VRS, whose soldiers consisted mainly of Bosnian-Serbs, which seemingly provides an answer to the perpetrator question. Yet this did not mean that all those considered to be Bosnian-Serbs were automatically perpetrators during the war, as several also fought in the ARBiH. In Sarajevo, a distinction was therefore made between those who decided to stay in the city and those who did not. Those Bosnian-Serbs who stayed were considered innocent co-citizens, and those who left were often seen as traitors or enemies (even if they did not fight for the opposing army and were equally forced to flee). Whether you had the chance to flee the city or stay and resist therefore served – generally speaking – as a test to separate the 'good guys' from the nationalist 'bad guys'.⁴³

Mayor Behmen's supposed ignorance may therefore be explained against the backdrop of a post-war persistence of such divisive stories surrounding innocence and heroism as well as a sense of pragmatism: the non-nationalist SDP frequently cooperates with nationalist parties and is therefore also dependent on the votes of Bosniaks.⁴⁴ His intention to rectify the perpetrator part on the memorial may thus be sincere, but the fact that the same text is still there and to date continues to serve as a text for new memorial boards shows that the BiH government feels no urgency to distance itself from it. In this case, a monument promoting a concrete reflection of the past sponsored by the government says just as much as a rectification that continues to be postponed.⁴⁵ In other words, the mayor's words remain hollow if no action is undertaken, and the debate surrounding this monument shows the government's paradoxical and problematic way of dealing with the past while trying to combine both the multinational narrative as well as the one of Bosniak victimhood.

Some of the young Sarajevans I talked to did not notice anything special about the text, either because they supported the notion that 'Serbians' were the perpetrators or, as a Bosnian human rights activist pointed out to me, because they just did not realize the possible offensiveness, as they

43 Maček, *Sarajevo under siege*, 116. However, what I found in my interviews was that during the war there was much distrust, fear and discrimination within the city against those considered to be Bosnian-Serbs and Bosnian-Croats, a topic that is not often discussed and perhaps is sometimes deliberately concealed, as it threatens the multi-ethnic image of the city.

44 Florian Bieber, *Post-war Bosnia. Ethnicity, Inequality and Public Sector Governance* (London: Palgrave, 2006), 104.

45 Iwona Irwin-Zarecka, *Frames of Remembrance. The Dynamics of Collective Memory* (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 1994), 13.

have become used to the divisive nationalist rhetoric.⁴⁶ Supporters of a non-nationalist approach rejected the phrasing more often by expressing discomfort when they would walk past it. Their feelings of uneasiness proved to resonate with everyday reality, since those who identified themselves as Bosnian-Serbs expressed how they felt offended by the text and feared it might give the impression that Bosnian-Serbs did not suffer at all.⁴⁷ This competition over victimhood was also reflected in the discussion surrounding another monument, one dedicated to the children who were killed during the siege of Sarajevo.

Competing Memory Narratives

Many of the victim associations that were formed after the war were forced to ally themselves with political parties in their struggle to survive and to claim recognition. Their goals might not have been political from the start, since all they wanted was to share their wartime experiences and to have their suffering recognized, but their narratives of victimization confirmed and supported non-reconciliatory and nationalist political aims. As a result, their memories became instrumentalized by nationalist politicians and in turn they were offered (partial) financial support for their campaigns and monuments. As a Bosnian human rights activist explains: 'They [the politicians] encouraged victims not to talk only about "my son", but to replace it with the suffering of "my people"'.⁴⁸ The establishment of the children's monument serves as an illustration of such ties and tensions.

A significant number of those who were killed or injured in Sarajevo during the war were children.⁴⁹ To commemorate these victims, a large monument was established in 2009 on the initiative of the Parents' Association 'Children Killed under the Siege' and supported by both the city government and the Ministry of Veteran Affairs. Along one of the main central roads, two green glass sculptures were constructed. They stand on a fountain base that fills itself continuously with water that is lit by night, representing a mother holding her child as well as an unfinished sandcastle left in the sea.⁵⁰ The text reads: 'Monument for killed children

46 Human rights activist, Sarajevo, interview by author, summer 2011.

47 Interviews by author in Sarajevo and Eastern Sarajevo, summer 2011.

48 Human rights activist, interview by author, summer 2011.

49 The number of approximately 1500 children who were killed in besieged Sarajevo is the number most frequently cited. This excludes those children killed outside of the siege.

50 Architect of the Sarajevo children's monument, interview by author, summer 2011.

under the siege of Sarajevo 1992-1995'. The subsurface on which the sculpture stands is imprinted with irregular footsteps, put there by the siblings of the killed children. A few meters away from the monument stand five rotating cylinders on a pedestal with the names of over 500 killed children.

Young Sarajevans were often ambivalent about this very prominent monument, ridiculing the aesthetics and protesting against its size and the costs to build it. But many said they appreciated the message of innocence, as it could have been their names listed on the cylinders. Their reflections, however, hardly gave mention to the heated public debate that was generated by the text of the monument before it was built. After the idea of the monument was approved, an expert team was appointed by the government, which turned out to have ambiguous ideas on who the monument should commemorate.⁵¹ During the war, some parts of Sarajevo were under Bosnian-Serb control, and years of political discussion revolved around the question of whether the victims of these areas should be included in the monument or not. Some prominent figures, such as the director of the Research and Documentation Center, quit the team, commenting that the initiators were being put under too much political influence.⁵² The discussion about the message came to an end when a new mayor was elected who was a member of the Bosniak nationalist party Social Democratic Action (SDA). A new expert team was put together, and it was decided that the monument would include only those children who died *under the siege*. This would exclude those children who lost their lives in parts of the city outside the siege (even if those areas would fall under present-day Sarajevo). This triggered protests from victim associations from the Republika Srpska who not only wanted 'their' child victims to be recognized but who also argued that the monument had been constructed on the very site where eight soldiers, presumably Bosnian-Serbs, had been killed.⁵³

Why did the Sarajevan government decide to exclude child victims from Bosnian-Serb-occupied areas of the city? A city government official

51 Internal document of the Sarajevo City Government, 'Children's Monument,' 6 December 2006, acquired by the author.

52 Director of Research and Documentation Center in Sarajevo, interview by author, summer 2011.

53 Representative of Missing Persons Association of East-Sarajevo, interview by author, summer 2011. This story was also dealt with in an article in the Bosnian weekly magazine *Dani*. It is assumed that the ARBiH is responsible for the killings of eight soldiers of the Yugoslav People's Army in 1992, but to date no one has been prosecuted for this event and it remains under-researched. Vildana Selimbegović, 'Zločin u velikom parku [Crime in the great park],' *DANI*, 29 March 2002.

explained to me that the government may have been put under pressure from the parents and relatives.⁵⁴ In an interview, a representative of the Parents' Association indeed confirmed that they preferred a separate monument for the children who were killed under the siege, arguing that the circumstances of these children who lost their lives could not be equated with those who were killed outside of the siege.⁵⁵ This is an understandable opinion, given the individual loss these parents had to deal with and given that some Bosnian-Serbs continue to deny responsibility for these crimes in Sarajevo.⁵⁶ Yet at the same time, the exclusion of certain child victims happened to be in line with the position of the Sarajevo government towards victims outside of the siege, so the standpoint of the Parents' Association must have been welcomed wholeheartedly by the city government.

Constructions of victimhood originate from individual traumatic experiences during a war and are often centered on mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion. In terms of collective feelings of victimization, this results in highlighting one's own victimhood over that of others, especially if these 'others' are considered perpetrators, as is the case in BiH.⁵⁷ The fact that the Bosnian-Serb elite regularly downplays and denies the Sarajevo siege may explain why it is difficult for survivors and relatives of the deceased to recognize 'the other' victims as equals. It has been clearly established that the VRS army was responsible for the majority of the massive crimes that were committed in and around Sarajevo, and understandably this suffering has become the center of attention. Yet the result is that, with the government allying itself with a victim association, a form of exclusive victimhood is promoted, with some victims more 'deserving' of a monument than others. By silencing certain forms of victimhood and making some lives more 'grievable', in Judith Butler's words,⁵⁸ the government in its

54 Government official on urban planning, Sarajevo City Government Council, interview by author, summer 2011.

55 Representative of Parents' Association Sarajevo, interview by author, summer 2011.

56 It is common for politicians in the RS as well as former wartime generals currently on trial at the ICTY to deliberately deny and avoid responsibility for alleged war crimes by the VRS in Sarajevo (and other places). Rachel Irwin, 'Karadzic denies Sarajevo Siege,' *Institute for War and Peace Reporting*, 6 March 2010.

57 Historian Elazar Barkan explains that there was little compassion from Czechs for the suffering of expelled Sudeten Germans after World War II. Their claims were considered immoral, coming from people who were considered to belong to a nation that was responsible for much worse atrocities. Koen Feyter, *Out of the Ashes. Reparation for Victims of Gross and Systematic Human Rights Violations* (Antwerp: Intersentia Publishers, 2005), 90-99.

58 Judith Butler, *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (London and New York: Verso, 2004).

position as the final decision-maker chose for a divisive, non-reconciliatory message. And by doing so, it rejected the opportunity to include all innocent victims as part of this monument.

As mentioned above, several young Sarajevans did not know or realize that the text was contested, as they were not always cognizant of the way politicians misuse this division of inside or outside the siege for their own nationalist goals. An NGO employee explained: 'Ordinary citizens do not know or care about victims in Grbavica or Lukavica [areas under Bosnian-Serb control], and Bosniak parties are not interested in it.'⁵⁹ Only a few interviewees were bothered by the discussion, seeing it as ugly and perverse. As one of my interviewees expressed: 'the government decided that children inside Sarajevo suffered more.'⁶⁰ For another young man, this approach makes the war more useless than it already was, saying: 'I would prefer [a monument] for all the children of Sarajevo, or even Bosnia. A child is a child.'⁶¹

There are, however, ordinary citizens who do try to focus on the silences the government deliberately tries to uphold. By publishing his article and participating in the aforementioned documentary, Haris Jusufović decided not to look away but instead confront his fellow citizens with the blind gaps in the dominant commemorative narrative:

I want to hear about what happened to my Serbian neighbors in Sarajevo. I want to know who is responsible for these crimes, who gave the orders, who carried them out, and in what political context the war crimes of Sarajevo took place. (...) I would like to know the number of killed Serbs in Sarajevo...⁶²

These are precisely the questions that are also important for the representatives of Bosnian-Serb victim associations in East-Sarajevo. With Bosniak nationalist parties having majority power in Sarajevo, it is difficult for them to obtain recognition for Bosnian-Serb victims or to set up monuments in Sarajevo itself. A representative of one of the victim associations in East-Sarajevo tells me how they are continuously confronted with the argument that nobody seemed to have killed Bosnian-Serbs in and around Sarajevo.

59 NGO employee Sarajevo, interview by author, summer 2011.

60 Interview in Sarajevo, summer 2011.

61 Ibid.

62 Haris Jusufović as quoted in Nidzara Ahmetašević, "NEMA ALI: Sarajevo se mora suočiti s "vlastitim" zločinima," *Slobodna Bosna*, 1 April 2015.

This organization is determined to organize commemorations and to find out the stories of those who remain missing.⁶³ Their objective of keeping alive the memory of these forgotten victims is obviously legitimate and their attempts to set up monuments are not prioritized by the Bosniak political elite. Nonetheless, their stories also reveal an exclusivist attitude. For example, these associations supported the establishment of a large religious cross commemorating mainly Bosnian-Serb soldiers of the VRS army. The cross was to be placed on *Trebević* hill overlooking the city of Sarajevo, the very hill from which Bosnian-Serb snipers of the VRS army used to shoot during the war. After years of discussions and a week before Bosnia's general elections took place in 2014, the large cross was indeed placed on the hill. Most Sarajevans I talked to considered the cross to be a classical provocation, given its size and prominent location, and it was quickly taken down by an angry Sarajevo citizen.⁶⁴ Bosnian-Serb victim associations felt they had the right to establish such a monument, especially since Bosniaks claimed their right to put a children's monument on the site where Bosnian-Serb soldiers were supposedly killed.⁶⁵

The main disagreement concerning this monument dominating the Sarajevo skyline concerns the responsibility of the VRS army for the majority of the crimes committed in Sarajevo during the siege. By setting up a cross engraved with the names of Bosnian-Serb soldiers who lost their lives in the area, the monument was an exclusive symbol for Bosnian-Serb suffering towering above a city that had suffered from the violence of soldiers from that same army. This is not to say that these Bosnian-Serb soldiers should not be commemorated. However, the form of this monument and the moral equation of the crimes committed on both sides reveal a confrontational and competitive attitude that fosters antagonism and reflects a downplaying of the suffering of Sarajevans.

The discussion concerning the children's monument and the *Trebević* cross reveals different forms of silencing, denial, and a lack of empathy towards 'the other'. Both do, however, point to a struggle for recognition that is blocked by both sides, leaving it up to individuals to produce alternative knowledge on how the past can be remembered in less exclusivist ways.

63 Representative of Missing Persons' Association in East-Sarajevo, interview by author, summer 2011.

64 "Hatić: Ja sam srušio krst na Zlatištu [Hatic: I crashed a cross at Zlatiste]," *Nezavisne novine*, 5 December 2014.

65 Representative of Missing Persons' Association in East-Sarajevo, interview by author, summer 2011.

Memory Activism

Sarajevan artists and active citizens were known for their creativity and resilience during the war,⁶⁶ and they have continued their civic disobediences and local inventiveness in the post-war memorial landscape. One such example is the so-called *Sarajevske ruže* (Sarajevo Roses) – a reference to the grenade craters marking spots where Sarajevans lost their lives. They are filled with blood-red paint and lack any specific explanation, simply popping up when one walks through the city's streets. An employee of the NGO *Akcija Gradana* (Citizens' Action), an organization that has tried to preserve this memorial, calls them 'dead poetry'.⁶⁷ When and on whose initiative these roses appeared is shrouded in myth,⁶⁸ making it mysterious sites of memory open to multiple interpretations. Without mentioning a perpetrator or favoring one victim over the other, this monument presents a more civic message showing the enormous impact of war on the city and its citizens. For some Sarajevans, this is precisely why they perceive it as an 'ugly' mark that obstructs the modern development of the city, regarding it as a monument for tourists. Many appreciate the monument, though, explaining that they are unconsciously aware of it: 'It's like a blind vision. Even when I do not look on the floor, I constantly skip that place.'⁶⁹ Despite the efforts of citizens' associations to preserve this war memory, only a few of the fifty original markers are left. Until recently, the government did not bother to protect these monuments, but in 2013 the Ministry of Veteran affairs started a process of renovation. They did not refrain, however, from ascribing their official message to the monument, stressing the roses 'symbolize the suffering of besieged Sarajevo'⁷⁰ and thereby transforming the non-nationalist site of memory into a politicized one.⁷¹

66 Maček, *Sarajevo under siege*.

67 Employee of NGO *Akcija Gradana* [Citizens' Action], interview and written correspondence by author, 25 July 2011. For more citizens' perceptions of the Sarajevo Roses, see the film clip made by young Sarajevans and East-Sarajevans as part of an educational film workshop organized by Bosnian-based *Youth Initiative for Human Rights BiH* and the Dutch-based *Anne Frank House*: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cbZLMMrJJEW>

68 Azra Junuzović, *Sarajevo Roses. Towards politics of remembering* (Sarajevo: ArmisPrint, 2006).

69 Interview by author in Sarajevo, summer 2011.

70 Safet Huremović, 'Počela rekonstrukcija Sarajevskih ruža [The reconstruction of the Sarajevo Roses]', *Oslobodenje*, 25 May 2012.

71 It is important to emphasize that focusing on the memory of the siege of Sarajevo is not in itself nationalist. Exhibitions at the Historical Museum in Sarajevo and the work of the FAMA collection show how one can remember the siege in more creative and less antagonistic ways.

Another more creative monument is a statue of a large can of beef representing food from the humanitarian aid packages that were supplied by the international community during the war. The monument is more than two meters high and represents the 'gratitude' from the 'grateful citizens of Sarajevo' towards the international community. It was set up as part of an initiative by the *Centar za Savremenu Umjetnost Sarajevo* (Sarajevo Centre for Contemporary Art) and presents a very ironic message:⁷²

Political aid we have received from the West is the same as the one we received as food: mysterious in content and with unknown ingredients, by mysterious manufacturer and with an undetermined period of validity.⁷³

A young Sarajevan called the monument a 'false, inaccurate prize' that stands for the past and exhibits the passivity of the international community, while others appreciate the cynicism behind it or regard it as a sincere thank you. The government was not keen on supporting the monument, fearing that it would offend the international community they are so reliant on, so they had the monument placed in a less prominent spot.⁷⁴

Both of these monuments receive little attention from the government. The roses were neglected for seventeen years, and the ICAR canned beef monument has been covered with graffiti for a long time. In its negligence and in its decision to move the monument, the government clearly shows a reluctance to acknowledge a more civic message that does not blame or honor a specific group. Yet, despite this imposed memory narrative, the citizens of Sarajevo continue to find ways to re-claim their public space. Groups of young activists are annually re-painting the Sarajevo Roses⁷⁵ and travelling to Belgrade to celebrate and commemorate the *Dani Sarajeva* (Days of Sarajevo) with their Serbian colleagues.⁷⁶ Although these young

My point here is that the non-nationalist memory of the siege can be misused for an exclusive nationalist narrative.

72 Bosnians are famous for their dark humor. See Anna Sheftel, 'Monument to the international community, from the grateful citizens of Sarajevo. Dark humor as counter-memory in post-conflict Bosnia-Herzegovina,' *Memory Studies* 5 (2011).

73 Written documentation from Sarajevo Centre for Contemporary Art, acquired by the author.

74 Director of Sarajevo Centre for Contemporary Art, interview by author, summer 2011. For more on the attitude of the international community towards monuments, see Moll, "Fragmented Memories." Ironically, the new United Nations building looks out over this specific monument.

75 "FOTO: Bojom podsjetili na krv iz sarajevskih ruža," *Aljazeera Balkan*, 2 May 2015.

76 Website *Dani Sarajeva*: <http://www.danisarajeva.com/category/vesti/>

activists are too few in number to counter the hegemonic narratives, their resilience reveals a possible new defined spirit of Sarajevo coming to terms with a war they did not even experience themselves.

Closing Thoughts

In BiH, competition between multiple memory narratives has resulted in a polarized post-war environment with competing narratives. Generally speaking, various groups in and around Sarajevo avail themselves of a pronounced victimhood narrative resulting in different forms of denial concerning their culpability, while at the same time excluding the victimhood of others. As emphasized before, this is not something that is exclusively Bosnian. The downplaying of one's own responsibility occurs in every post-conflict situation, and Sarajevo's public culture of remembrance is no exception.

Sarajevo's government mainly focuses on the remembrance of the fallen soldiers of the ARBiH and the victims of the siege, while divergent narratives that do not fit the Bosniak victimhood narrative are given less priority. The government's attitude encourages division by pointing and blaming (the texts on the memorial plaques), by excluding 'less deserving' victims (the children's monument), or by neglecting more civic stories (Sarajevo Roses). This standpoint is perpetuated by a rhetoric of denial and provocations from neighboring East-Sarajevo in the Republika Srpska.

These hegemonic narratives are not alone in the commemorative arena, revealing the heterogeneity of remembering war. Over the years, several citizens have come to resist the exclusive and selective narratives. Despite their marginalized status, their civic initiatives show cross-border solidarities in which acknowledging one's own responsibility and a more creative stance towards remembrance are deemed important and necessary in order to be able to move on. Recovering from war may take a few generations, but the bottom-up engagement to confront silences and to promote an open discussion appears to be growing slowly. This has not resulted in a sincere acknowledgement of the diversified experiences of all innocent victims yet. To counter the denial and selective commemorative narratives in and around Sarajevo depends, therefore, on the continued effort of activists and individuals.

