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ORLI FRIDMAN

Memories of the 1999 NATO Bombing in Belgrade, Serbia

Abstract. This paper analyses the memories of Belgrade residents of the 1999 NATO bombing of Serbia (then part of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia). By focusing on the memories of this event, yet placing them in a broader context of the conflicts of the 1990s—the breakup of Yugoslavia and the post-Yugoslav wars—this essay explores what international intervention has meant to respondents in Belgrade by documenting memories of international intervention among older and younger generations, as well as among active members of antiwar NGOs in Serbia and citizens who were not engaged in activism during the 1990s. The paper aims to expand the scope of the discussions on dealing with the past and on transitional justice in the Western Balkans and to place them in the context of social memory studies and the study of post-conflict transformation processes. Furthermore, by presenting the case study of Serbia, this text contributes to the analysis of local mnemonic battles as part of the creation of collective memories of the 1990s in post-Milošević Serbia, and it sheds light on the memories of the bombing as related to the war in Kosovo and the subsequent effects on shaping postwar Serbia–Kosovo relations.

Orli Fridman is a Lecturer at the Faculty of Media and Communications (FMK), Singidunum University, where she heads the Center for Comparative Conflict Studies (CFCCS). She is also the Academic Director of the School for International Training (SIT) Study Abroad program in the Balkans.

Introduction

International intervention is not enacted upon spaces that are empty of meaning for the people who live there. Such interventions often fail to take local sociocultural contexts and concerns into account.[1] From a vantage of sixteen years after NATO's intervention in the Kosovo crisis and the 1999 bombing of what was then still the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (FRY), this essay attempts to bring local concerns and voices to the forefront of the discussions about inter-

[1] Stephanie Schwandner-Sievers, Gaps of Concern. An Inconclusive Conclusion, in: Peter Siani-Davies, ed, International Intervention in the Balkans since 1995, London 2003, 194-217, 194.

national intervention and to analyse the ways that people in Belgrade, Serbia, remember and speak about NATO's bombing of their city and country.

By focusing on this event, yet placing it in a broader context of the conflicts of the 1990s—the breakup of Yugoslavia and the post-Yugoslav wars—this essay points to the gap between the official state narratives and the way ordinary people recall this period. It attempts to challenge the dominant hegemonic narrative of victimisation by bringing to the forefront the experiences of ordinary Belgrade residents during the months of the NATO bombings, and analysing how they recollect this period. This event is therefore placed in a sequence of crises following the wars waged in locations outside of Serbia proper (Croatia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, and Kosovo) that culminated in the war experience being brought close to home during the seventy-eight-day NATO bombing campaign. By positioning the NATO bombings as one predicament among a series of ongoing crises that engulfed people's lives during the 1990s, this text poses the questions: How is this event remembered and discussed (or not discussed, and if so or if not, why?) in hindsight, more than a decade and half later? What narratives other than those of victimisation have emerged from those memories?

This essay presents an analysis of data collected as part of a research project aiming to explore the memories of Belgrade residents about the months of the bombings conducted more than a decade after the NATO campaign.[2] Further questions considered in the project include: How are these events being framed in the present? What memories are now emerging, and how do they fit into the memories of the 1990s in Serbia? How do these fragmented memories and the current mnemonic battles over the 1990s shape the way people remember this particular event and understand the conflicts of the 1990s, particularly the war in Kosovo? How do these memories reflect on the understandings of the post-conflict years, especially in relation to the war in Kosovo? Why are these topics so rarely spoken about in private or in social circles? How do such silences shape the present understanding of commemoration rituals emerging in the society? These questions and others will be discussed in the following pages.

Approaching Memories of the 1999 NATO Bombing from the Receiving End

'Dealing with the past', as framed in the transitional justice literature, has become the term that signifies the most common approach in academic and

[2] This research was part of the project 'On the Receiving End. Towards More Critical and Inclusive Perspectives on International Intervention', funded by the British Academy, in cooperation with the Centre for International Intervention (cii) at Surrey University. As indicated by the title, the project sought to analyse the voices of those who experienced international interventions from the receiving end.

practitioners' discussions on post-conflict processes in the post-Yugoslav states. At the heart of this approach is the conviction among scholars and policymakers that 'stability, peace and a genuine democratic transformation of […] post-conflict societies can only be achieved if the past is "dealt with" or "worked through" in some way'.[3] These recent pasts, however—as related in this text to the wars of the 1990s or, in other writings and analysis, to events that took place during World War II—are still being contested and debated, as they are being (re)constructed, shaped, silenced, commemorated, and even denied or negated at present. In the region as a whole, and in Serbia in particular, such mnemonic battles are shaped in the space that Elizabeth Jelin has referred to as a space of conflicts over the narratives and representations of the past,[4] or what Todor Kuljić has framed as a civil war of memories.[5] From this point of view, social memory studies is crucial for the analysis of the current postwar period and the potential conflict transformation processes that may be taking place.[6] I approach such processes here through an analysis of the domestic dynamics in Serbia and the country's internal processes of collectively remembering and forgetting its recent past.

Social memory studies points out that memory's dynamic characteristics are never fixed, but are rather constantly constructed and reconstructed in reference to the evolving needs of the present.[7] The term 'collective memory', as attributed to Maurice Halbwachs, the figure often referred to as the founding father of contemporary memory studies,[8] raises critical challenges to scholars—in particular the widely discussed, unresolved tension between individualist and collectivist strains running through Halbwachs's work on collective memory.[9] This raises a challenge for the present study, too: How should scholarship ap-

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[3] Jasna Dragović-Soso, Conflict, Memory, Accountability. What Does Coming to Terms with the Past Mean?, in: Wolfgang Petritsch / Vedran Džihić, eds, Conflict and Memory. Bridging Past and Future in (South East) Europe, Baden-Baden 2010, 29-46, 29.

[4] Elizabeth Jelin, State Repression and the Labors of Memory, Minneapolis 2003.

[5] Todor Kuljić, Remembering Crimes – Proposal and Reactions, in: Dragica Vujadinović / Vladimir Goati, eds, Between Authoritarianism and Democracy, vol. III, Serbia at the Political Crossroads, Belgrade 2009, 197-212.

[6] Conflict transformation is here understood as representing a comprehensive set of lenses not only for the analysis of how conflicts emerge and evolve but, to an even greater extent, of how they may bring about change in the relational dimensions between groups in conflict. John Paul Lederach, Building Peace. Sustainable Reconciliation in Divided Societies, Washington/DC 1997, 81-85.

[7] Dragović-Soso, Conflict, Memory, Accountability, 30.

[8] Jeffrey Olick / Vered Vinitzky-Seroussi / Daniel Levy, eds, The Collective Memory Reader, Oxford 2011, 5.

[9] Jeffrey Olick, The Politics of Regret. On Collective Memory and Historical Responsibility, New York 2007, 17-19.

proach the memories of the NATO bombing? As private individual memories and narratives, or rather, as part of the collective memories of the 1990s in Serbia? I approach this tension here by applying Jeffery Olick's framework for social memory studies, which advocates the use of collective memory as a sensitising term for a wide variety of mnemonic processes, practices, and outcomes, as well as their interrelations. Within this framework, mnemonic structures can be explored as ways of organising remembering that are never truly separated from the individual and the social or the collective. Accordingly, there is no individual memory without social experience, no collective memory without individuals participating in a shared life.[10]

Hence, memories of the 1999 NATO bombing are analysed here as *collected memories*, which form the aggregated individual memories of a group's members; and as *collective memories*, which refer to the public discourse and the images of the past that speak in the name of collectivities.[11] According to Halbwachs,

> 'there are as many collective memories as there are groups in a society. It is of course individuals who remember, not groups or institutions, but these individuals, being located in a specific group context, draw on that context to remember or recreate the past. Hence, every collective memory requires the support of a group delimited in space and time.'[12]

The individuals chosen to take part in this study, however, do not encompass the full range of the social diversity or the memories available in Serbia today, and represent only a partial survey. Given the limited scope of this project and text, the choice of participants was defined and limited by several categories: a) age group: those who experienced the NATO bombing as adults (who were 18 or older) and those who experienced the bombing as under-18 teenagers;[13] b) political disposition: those who were active members of antiwar NGOs in Serbia during the 1990s, and others who were not engaged in civic activism in that period; and c) location: since most of the participants resided in Belgrade during the bombing, primarily memories of the bombing in Belgrade are analysed here. Yet to ensure some degree of diversity and to point out possible

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[10] Olick, The Politics of Regret, 34.

[11] Dragović-Soso, Conflict, Memory, Accountability, 30. An in-depth discussion on collected and collective memories in given in Olick, The Politics of Regret, 17-35.

[12] Maurice Halbwachs, On Collective Memory, Chicago 1992, 22.

[13] Olick builds on the Mannheimian tradition in the sociology of knowledge, which is helpful for the methodological choice taken here. According to this approach, a generation exists if a number of birth cohorts share a historical experience that creates a community of perception. Such cohort differences raise interesting questions, such as 'How do individuals born in different periods remember and evaluate earlier moments?' Olick, The Politics of Regret, 25.

ways the project may continue and advance, additional locations were chosen: one participant, for example, had resided in Niš[14] in 1999.[15]

As mentioned above, by focusing on memories of the 1999 NATO bombing, this essay aims to extend the scope of the discussions on dealing with the past and transitional justice and to place them in the context of social memory studies and, more specifically, in the context of memories of the 1990s in Serbia. In that sense, my analysis here focuses less on the events that took place and more on the reflections of this study's participants and their collected and collective memories fifteen years after the NATO air campaign. Before entering into my analysis, I will first briefly place the 1999 bombing within the context of the discussions on international intervention in the Balkans and of the politics of memory in Serbia.

Approaching the Study of International Interventions from the Receiving End

International intervention today cannot be considered, discussed, or analysed in isolation from the 1990s incursions in the Balkans. Several of these interventions led to the establishment of intervention (or non-intervention) norms and shaped the forms such norms have taken, and have influenced their aims and often differing aspirations.[16] Four frequently overlapping dimensions characterised international intervention in the Yugoslav wars of the 1990s: diplomacy, recognition, humanitarian action, and coercion.[17] What seemed to have sparked most of the debates in academic scholarship and in the media were the use of coercive policies, particularly economic sanctions and airstrikes, and their roles in international conflict resolution, as well as the impact of external coercion on domestic political outcomes and the question of its contribution to domestic democratisation processes.[18]

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[14] Niš, Serbia's third largest city in Serbia, was strongly targeted and hit during the bombing. The city is closer to the Kosovo border than Belgrade is and had a significant number of military barracks and military personnel stationed there at that time.

[15] While most of the data analysed here was collected during 2013, some data from my earlier fieldwork about antiwar activism in Serbia, collected in 2004, have also been used.

[16] Peter Siani-Davies, Introduction. International Intervention (and Non-Intervention) in the Balkans, in: Siani-Davies, ed, International Intervention in the Balkans since 1995, 1-31, 1. The period of data collection and interviews coincided with international discussions in the fall of 2013 on intervention in Syria, various declarations of US president Barack Obama on the matter, and the vote in the British parliament against intervention. Some of the participants hence expressed firm opinions either in favour of or against an international intervention in Syria. Given the length of this text, I did not include this data in my discussion here.

[17] Siani-Davies, Introduction, 16.

[18] Jasna Dragović-Soso, The Impact of International Intervention on Domestic Political Outcomes. Western Coercive Policies and the Milošević Regime, in: Siani-Davies, ed, International Intervention in the Balkans since 1995, 120-135, 120.

Indeed, some participants in this study, especially those who had been engaged in antiwar civic activism during the 1990s, voiced strong concerns regarding this particular question of the relations between external coercion and local political dimensions. There is a consensus that sanctions imposed on the FRY during the 1990s did not weaken the regime but instead led to the reinforcement of its control over the levers of power in Serbia.[19]

I discussed the choice of terminology relating to the NATO bombing with some of the study's participants: although state officials in Serbia still use terms such as 'NATO aggression', I found that terms such as intervention and bombing (*bombardovanje*) were the most common ones used. I therefore use 'NATO bombing' and '1999 bombing' interchangeably. Approaching the 1999 bombing campaign from the interveners' end (and not from the receiving end), Peter Siani-Davies suggests that 'any choice of term to describe the activities of the outside world within the [Balkan] region is essentially political'.[20] In this sense, the rhetoric that followed the intervention in Kosovo provides insight: as in the aftermath of the bombing of Serbia, actors from the international community did not use 'intervention' to describe their activities but rather opted for terms such as 'assistance', 'partnership', 'regional ownership', or even 'integration'.[21] In contrast, among ordinary people in Serbia, naming choices may directly point to political positions and perspectives towards the 1990s, as well as towards the present. For example, in certain anti-nationalist and antiwar circles during the 1990s (and in the present), some expressed their support for international intervention and for the bombing campaign in particular, while others in more nationalist circles still use the term 'NATO aggression'. Interestingly, there were debates among ordinary people in Kosovo regarding the nature of the international intervention that took place in the aftermath of the bombing concerning the creation of the UNMIK and EULEX structures—which, given the limited scope of this text and research, will not be included in the analysis here. An exploration of these debates would offer some important critiques of international interventions as well.[22]

Placing the Memories of the NATO Bombing in the Context of the Memories of the 1990s in Serbia

As mentioned, memories of the 1990s in Serbia, as well as those of earlier historical events (such as World War II or the experience of socialist Yugoslavia),

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[19] Dragović-Soso, Impact of International Intervention, 127.

[20] Siani-Davies, Introduction, 6.

[21] Siani-Davies, Introduction, 24.

[22] Cf. Nita Luci, Interventions in Kosova. Un/welcomed Guests?, in: Rama Mani / Thomas G. Weiss, eds, Responsibility to Protect. Cultural Perspectives in the Global South, London/New York 2011, 167-194.

are fragmented and often contested. Post-Yugoslav, post-Milošević Serbia opted to place ideas, events, and symbols from the nineteenth century in the centre of its new identity, discourses, calendars, and value systems.[23] As I discuss in my analysis of calendars as sites of memory[24] and of alternative calendars in post-Milošević Serbia,[25] out of the history of a decade of wars, of which at least a portion were undeniably due to Serbian aggression, the memory of Serbian victimhood during the 1999 NATO bombing was promoted and elevated, while other events of the wars have been buried in deafening silence.[26] Twenty years after the beginning of Yugoslavia's violent dissolution and the wars of the 1990s, it became evident that Serbia as a society never made a clean break with the politics of Slobodan Milošević. While processes of EU integration may have achieved a political consensus, the nationalist ideas of the 1990s still flourish.[27]

In this context, numerous commemorative events take place every year in Serbia to commemorate crimes committed against Serbs in Croatia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, and Kosovo. Even though such commemorative rituals are yet to be officially ingrained in the new state calendar of the post-Yugoslav and post-Milošević era, they are acknowledged and attended by state and church officials, by veterans, and by the members of victims' associations, and they receive media coverage.[28] Tanja Petrović frames the more recent mnemonic trends in Serbia as a brand of politics that strives to satisfy everyone. Such an aim, she writes, cannot be achieved without relativisation, denial, and the avoidance of responsibility. Take, for example, the monument erected in 2012 in central Belgrade near the central train and bus station. Erected during the thirteenth anniversary of the NATO bombing, the monument is dedicated to 'the victims of the wars of the 1990s and the defenders of the homeland in the wars from 1990 to 1999'.[29] Interestingly, in the interviews I conducted, some

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[23] Tanja Petrović, Serbia's Quest for a Usable Past, *Tr@nsit online*, 14 October 2013, http://www.iwm.at/read-listen-watch/transit-online/serbias-quest-for-a-usable-past/.

[24] Eviatar Zerubavel, Calendars and History. A Comparative Study of the Social Organization of National Memory, in: Jeffrey Olick, ed, States of Memory. Continuities, Conflicts, and Transformations in National Retrospection, Durham/NC 2003, 315-337.

[25] Orli Fridman, Alternative Calendars and Memory Work in Serbia. Anti-War Activism after Milošević, *Memory Studies* 8, no. 2 (2015), 212-226, DOI: 10.1177/1750698014558661.

[26] David as quoted in Fridman, Alternative Calendars, 215.

[27] Petrović, Serbia's Quest, 7.

[28] Cf. Održan parastos žrtvama 'Oluje', *B92*, 4 August 2012, http://www.b92.net/info/vesti/index.php?yyyy=2012&mm=08&dd=04&nav_id=632180; Memorial Service for Serbs Killed by Croat Forces, *B92*, 9 September 2014, http://www.b92.net/eng/news/society.php?yyyy=2014&mm=09&dd=09&nav_id=91553.

[29] A discussion about the debates surrounding the erection of the monument is provided by Lea David, Mediating International and Domestic Demands. Mnemonic Battles Surrounding the Monument to the Fallen of the Wars of the 1990s in Belgrade, *Nationalities Papers* 42, no. 4 (2014), 655-673, http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/00905992.2013.874995. Another monument related to the bombing campaign is the Eternal Flame monument, built by the Milošević

participants were not even aware that this monument had been put up, or that commemorative events and practices are held there annually on 24 March, the date in 1999 when the bombing campaign began.[30]

Such commemorations, although they contribute to discourses of victimisation and strengthen them, do not enlarge the space for the emergence of any public debate on the responsibility of the state or its mismanagement of the issues related to the refugee influx into Serbia during *Oluja* [Operation Storm] in the summer of 1995 and in 1999 (from Kosovo during and after the NATO bombing). Hence, the question of responsibility remains at the heart of the mnemonic battles in Serbia as well as in the entire region.

Questions of responsibility, guilt, and denial are at the core of recent academic work relating to the Serbian context.[31] In her discussion of narratives of denial in post-conflict Serbia, Jelena Obradović-Wochnik analyses narratives of victimisation and victimhood. She shows that the prevailing sentiments among her respondents, who are ordinary citizens, are those of victimhood—they see themselves as victims of Milošević, of the 1990s conflicts, and of the NATO airstrikes.[32] Narratives that cast the self or one's community as victims, she writes,

> 'are not always attempts to obliterate the victimhood of others and deny their suffering but may be attempts to position oneself in more favorable way towards

regime in 2000 to commemorate the first anniversary of the 1999 NATO bombing. Analysis of this monument has been provided in Christine Lavrence, Between Monumental History and Experience. Remembering and Forgetting War in Belgrade, *Ethnologie francaise* 37, no. 3 (2007), 441-447, http://www.jstor.org/stable/40991428?seq=1#page_scan_tab_contents. There is no annual ceremony or any commemorative events held near this monument.

[30] The sixteenth anniversary of the bombing commemorated in March 2015 marked new mnemonic practices in Belgrade, with a new ceremony held on Kneza Miloša Street in front of the ruins of the former *Generalštab* building. The ceremony was attended by top Serbian state officials, including the prime minister, and was broadcast live on state TV. This event took place after I had completed this text and hence is not included in the data analysed here. Information about the ceremony is given in Ivana Nikolić, Serbia Mourns NATO Bombing Victims, *Balkan Insight*, 25 March 2015, available at http://www.balkaninsight.com/en/article/serbia-won-t-forget-nato-victims. State-sponsored commemorations in 2016 were mounted in several locations, including Varavin (attended by Prime Minister Vučić) and Belgrade, in front of the Dragiša Mišović hospital (attended by President Nikolić). Cf. Ivana Nikolić, Serbia Remembers NATO Bombing Casualties, *Balkan Insight*, 24 March 2016, http://www.balkaninsight.com/en/article/serbia-remembers-nato-bombing-victims-03-24-2016. These commemorations, too, took place after this text had been written.

[31] Cf. Daša Duhaček, Breme našeg doba: odgovornost i rasuđivanje u delu Hane Arent, Belgrade 2011 [The Burden of Our Times. Responsibility and Reasoning in the Work of Hannah Arendt]; Daša Duhaček, The Making of Political Responsibility. Hannah Arendt and/in the Case of Serbia, in: Jasmina Lukić et al., eds, Women and Citizenship in Central and Eastern Europe, Burlington/VT 2006, 205-224; Nenad Dimitrijević, Duty to Respond. Mass Crime, Denial, and Collective Responsibility, Budapest 2011; Eric Gordy, Guilt, Responsibility, and Denial. The Past at Stake in Post-Milošević Serbia, Philadelphia 2013.

[32] Jelena Obradović-Wochnik, Ethnic Conflict and War Crimes in the Balkans. The Narratives of Denial in Post-Conflict Serbia, London 2013, 165.

recent developments or attempts to make sense of one's own, often deeply unhappy difficult experience of the 1990s'.[33]

However, as has emerged from the data collected for this study, and as I will show in my analysis, narratives of victimisation that had already surfaced during the seventy-eight days of the bombing campaign[34] did, in many cases, shatter all interest, knowledge, and awareness of the events that took place in Kosovo, from mass crimes against Albanians to specific acts of ethnic cleansing—and continues to do so. Hence, in my understanding, the obliteration of the (suffering of the) other did take place, and extends into the present to block processes not only of transitional justice, but of conflict transformation. I argue that the memories of the NATO bombing as framed in the new Serbian calendar and in more recent mnemonic practices contribute to an ongoing lack of empathy in Serbia and to a sense of a frozen conflict between Serbs and Albanians in relation to the recent war in Kosovo.

By zooming in on the memories of the 1999 NATO bombing in Serbia, this study allows other memories and narratives beyond those of victimhood to emerge. When we look into the memories of the experiences of ordinary citizens residing in Belgrade during the bombing, additional narratives come to the surface: stories involving friendships, the best parties in town, a local sense of humour, and sarcastic graffiti on the walls of the city take their places side by side with memories that bear a sense of fear, despair, and, above all, great confusion.

Memories of the 1999 Bombing. Data and Analysis

Pre Bombing: 'Are You Going to Bomb Us, or Shall I Renovate My Flat First?'

The months building up to the beginning of the bombing are quite fuzzy in the memories shared with me. People remember a sense of confusion, of anticipation that something bigger or terrible was about to happen—a sense that 'something was in the air'. I even heard reference to a graffiti that appeared in the city some

[33] Obradović-Wochnik, Ethnic Conflict and War Crimes in the Balkans, 166.

[34] An analysis of narratives of victimisation that emerged during and after the bombing campaign, and their representation in postcards issued in Serbia in 1999, is given in Lidija Milić, From Serbia with Hate. A Case Study in Globalization, Trauma and Language, *Dialectical Anthropology* 27 (2003), 331-353, DOI: 10.1023/B:DIAL.0000006157.04049.84. Eric Gordy also refers to a sense of victimisation already evident right after the bombing: 'the NATO bombing campaign in 1999 also contributed to a widespread feeling of victimization that was mostly neither artificial nor a product of media propaganda'. Eric Gordy, Tracing Dialogue on the Legacy of War Crimes in Serbia, in: Dubravka Žarkov / Marlies Glasius, eds, Narratives of Justice In and Out of the Courtroom, New York 2013, 111-130, 114.

time before the bombing, which posed the question, 'Are you going to bomb us, or shall I renovate my flat first?' But mostly people seemed unable to believe that there would really be airstrikes. As one participant recalled:

> 'None of the ordinary people that I knew believed that the bombing was going to happen. My mom went to see a theatre show that night [the first night of the bombing campaign], even though it was stated that it was going to happen.'[35]

The experience of war after all, as some respondents explained, had never come this close to home before: the wars in Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina and in Kosovo were waged somewhere far afield, not in Serbia proper.

Prior to the bombing campaign, there had been debates among some in antiwar circles—those against and those in favour of foreign military intervention. Antiwar and antinationalist activists still remember the months leading up to the bombing campaign as an important time. As tensions rose in Kosovo in 1998 and as momentum seemed to be building towards an intervention, threats against activists from groups such as the Women in Black in Serbia became stronger. As one Woman in Black recalled:

> 'Šešelj [Vojislav Šešelj, the leader of the Serbian Radical Party] threatened that in case of a military intervention they would kill one Woman in Black for each NATO plane—*jedan avion nato-a, jedna žena u crnom*.'[36]

According to her, this act of intimidation, as stated in Šešelj's speech in parliament, was a real threat, directed towards not only the Women in Black but also members of other antiwar groups such as the Humanitarian Law Centre, the Helsinki Committee, and the Belgrade Circle, and towards independent journalists who were then marked as the greatest enemies of the state.[37] In the period building up to the bombing, some of the leaders and founders of the Women in Black and other opposition groups had to leave Belgrade, because they risked becoming targets not just of the regime, but also of ordinary people who blamed them for purportedly non-patriotic actions. Yet others decided to remain. The decisions to stay in the city or leave, and to support the bombing or oppose it, would number among the main points of contention and internal conflicts among antiwar groups and the individuals within them.

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[35] Interview with M.T., 28 October 2013.

[36] As quoted in Orli Fridman, It Was Like Fighting a War with Our Own People. Anti-War Activism in Serbia during the 1990s, *Nationalities Papers* 39, no. 4 (2011), 507-522, 517, DOI: 10.1080/00905992.2011.579953.

[37] Fridman, It Was Like Fighting a War with Our Own People, 517-518.

Should I Stay or Should I Go?

To stay in Belgrade or leave: this was a matter reflected upon in all my interviews with individuals who were adults during the bombing, even though I didn't always raise the issue myself. Being able to leave was (and still is) perceived as a mark of privilege, for the holder of a Yugoslav passport needed a visa to enter any other country at that time.[38] As one interviewee, then a journalist for *Blic* remembered,

> 'people who had already been marked as traitors, independent journalists,[39] people from B92 or antiwar NGOs, had the privilege to leave Belgrade and watch the bombing from Montenegro or from Budapest'.[40]

Some who left said that they then felt guilty for not staying. For others, though, leaving was not really an option. As one respondent explained:

> 'It was a dilemma for everyone, and we immediately decided to stay in Belgrade. I had too many students, friends, family members; I could not just pack up and leave. We were also naïve to believe that NATO was not going to target civilians but only military targets. This was probably the intention but how do you differentiate when a military target is near a hospital? What they called "collateral damage" […].'[41]

Staying was also a statement of preference for those who had arrived in Belgrade as refugees from earlier wars in Bosnia-Herzegovina or Croatia. One participant, who was a sixteen-year-old teenager in 1999, had fled as a nine-year-old from Sarajevo to Serbia with her mother and sister when the city was besieged. She recalled what was for her an unforgettable moment:

> 'I had already been living then [in 1999] in Serbia for seven years […]. My parents decided to move back to Sarajevo [when the bombing started] because Belgrade was not safe anymore. I remember my mother asking me what we should pack, and me thinking to myself, I cannot be a refugee all over again. I told my parents that I was not going […]. It was the first time I stood up against a decision of my parents, and I had it my way, they listened to me.'[42]

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[38] Additionally, men of conscription age were not able to simply leave the country.

[39] One independent journalist, Slavko Ćuruvija, was mentioned in most of the interviews; he was remembered almost as a symbol by those who were active in antiwar circles in the 1990s. Ćuruvija was assassinated by the regime during the bombing campaign [on 11 April 1999] near his home in downtown Belgrade. He was the editor of *Dnevni Telegraf*, a free media outlet that was shut down.

[40] Interview with M.S., 31 October 2013. Budapest in particular became an interesting hub for many who left. What has emerged from the data gathered was the dynamics of life in Budapest during these months, as well as the dynamics among many ex-Yugoslav students then attending university at CEU (Central European University). Especially of interest to me are the memories of the interaction at the time between students from Kosovo and those from Serbia.

[41] Interview with D.D., 26 June 2013.

[42] Interview with N.S., 9 October 2013.

For some, leaving was the only way to avoid the military draft.[43] One participant in the study, who was an undergraduate student at the University of Belgrade at the time of the bombing, explained how he, along with most of his friends, found a way out:

> 'I got a letter from the local military office with instructions to show up the next morning on site […]. I then heard that once you show up, they immediately send you to Kosovo. I was able through family connections to get a special permit to leave the country and go to a "music festival" abroad, which in fact never took place. My permission [to leave] was [only] for seven days but I stayed for two months.'[44]

This sort of act was also seen as a matter of privilege: resisting the draft remained a personal act, as resistance or conscientious objection did not grow into a political movement.[45] To leave the country to evade the draft or to escape the madness, one needed to have the right connections, and access to sufficient funds.

Support the Bombing? Or Stand Against It?

Leaving, choosing not to participate in the war, or not to stay and live under such conditions was most often supported by a fierce resistance to Milošević, his regime and his policies. But towards the NATO bombing campaign, opinions varied. As Jasna Dragović-Soso has explained, 'even non-nationalist Serbs who were long-time opponents of the regime saw Rambouillet as a stark choice between foreign occupation and bombing'.[46] The question whether to oppose or to openly take a stand in favour of the intervention generated major internal disagreements within antiwar and anti-nationalist circles. One such divisive moment occurred after the bombing had begun, when a group of self-described 'concerned citizens' signed and published the statement entitled 'Let Civility

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[43] Mobilisation was in place when the war in Croatia began, as well as when the war in Kosovo broke out. In Belgrade, many men became deserters: some data suggest that as many as two hundred thousand draftees refused to serve in the military during the conflicts, seeking asylum or staying in hiding. Lilić and Kovačević-Vučo, quoted in Orli Fridman, Alternative Voices. Serbia's Anti-War Activists, 1991-2004, PhD dissertation, George Mason University 2006, 220-221.

[44] Interview with V.M., 28 October 2013.

[45] In my earlier work on the antiwar movement in Serbia, I discuss the issue of conscientious objection in Serbia, from the coining of the term itself (*prigovor savesti*) to its actual practice, supported first by the antimilitarist antiwar group Women in Black, and later, by other NGOs such as YUCOM (Yugoslav Committee of Lawyers for Human Rights) and YUBCO (Yugoslav Bureau for Conscientious Objection). Additionally, during the bombing campaign there was an interesting initiative to create a safe house for deserters in Budapest for men who had escaped the country to avoid being sent to fight in Kosovo. Fridman, Alternative Voices, 220-236.

[46] Dragović-Soso, Impact of International Intervention, 128.

Prevail'.[47] The text was an appeal to President Milošević, to the representatives of the Kosovar Albanians, NATO, and the EU, and to US leaders to immediately cease all violence and military activity and to engage in a search for a political solution to the conflict. Twenty-seven intellectuals, including prominent figures and leaders of antiwar civil society in Serbia, signed—but others did not. This became a sensitive issue and remains so even today, as there were those who supported some form of intervention to stop the madness but harboured reservations towards military involvement and resisted supporting such an action, especially because they had to live with the intervention's consequences. While some gave their support and signed the appeal, others criticised it and made it evident that they objected to it being addressed to the international community or to the Kosovar Albanians. Those who signed made a point of publicly opposing the violence inflicted on all citizens of Serbia by the international intervention.[48]

As one of the signatories, a leader among Serbia's feminist antiwar circles, reflected fourteen years later,

> 'What I was looking for in the statement was a clear assertion not only against the bombing in Belgrade, but also against what the paramilitary forces, army and police forces were doing in Kosovo […]. Only now when I read it again, did I notice the word aggression, a word that I do not agree with […]. That word was and still is a buzzword of the Milošević regime.'[49]

For some of the signatories, the initiative itself represented an important, even a brave step. In the words of the late antiwar activist Jelena Šantić, who signed the appeal and later participated in a rally in Berlin against the bombing:

> 'I talked [in Berlin] about why the NATO intervention could not bring about democracy, [about] what destruction and the killing of civilians in the name of ever-changing goals really means, about our understanding of the tragedy of Kosovar Albanians, about the fight of non-governmental organisations against the war and the great responsibility of Slobodan Milošević.'

In an interview with a German newspaper, she added:

> 'Milošević first destroyed civil society, then the NATO bombs shocked intellectuals in the country who supported human rights and democracy, and pushed them towards anti-Western sentiment which has in the meantime enveloped the entire society. Those who worked for tolerance, who explained that human rights were rights of individuals, had to face the fact that Western democracies exposed ten million people to bombs so that they could punish one politician […]. The West is mistaken to only focus on Milošević. Even when he is no longer in power, influential

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[47] Let Civility Prevail, as published on Nikos Sarantakos' homepage, Belgrade, 16 April 1999, http://www.sarantakos.com/kosovo/ks13civil.html.

[48] Fridman, Alternative Voices, 111-112.

[49] Interview with D.D., 26 June 2013.

> and networked democratic forces will not automatically appear. Instead, there will be an empty field, devastated by NATO bombs.'[50]

The position against the bombing is still very clearly articulated by antiwar activists as well as non-activists,

> 'not only because it fostered national homogeneity but because we were in principle against military means and military intervention, we were against bombing, against anyone being bombed'.[51]

The extent of the bombing's harmful consequences for civic values and the civic struggle for human rights among activists in Serbia became clear in retrospect. At the time and in the aftermath of the events, antiwar activists felt betrayed by the international community, which was reluctant to show any support for the opposition to Milošević, especially during the 1996-97 student demonstrations against the regime (sparked by the stealing of local elections). The international community stuck to the argument that Milošević was a guarantee of the Dayton Peace Accords, which had ended the war in Bosnia-Herzegovina.[52] As Jasna Dragović-Soso has explained, Milošević was indeed considered by the United States and the bulk of the international community as a potential partner for peace in the Balkans throughout most of the mid-1990s, not as an intractable foe of democracy and stability. In fact, coercive Western diplomacy had the effect of rallying the Serbian public behind the flag and of undermining those forces that had tried, during the 1990s, to engage in peaceful dialogue with representatives of the Kosovar Albanians.[53]

And yet, by 1999, not everyone was opposing foreign intervention, and not everyone was rallying behind the Serbian flag. Individuals in interviews I conducted in 2013 as well as back in 2004 revealed the presence of certain views, albeit unpopular at the time, that held that Serbia deserved to be punished—thus understanding, if not supporting, the so-called rationale behind the bombing campaign. Some even admitted feeling to some extent relieved when the intervention finally came, stating that it should have occurred much earlier—that way, the Milošević regime's atrocities could have been stopped earlier (in reference to the war in Bosnia-Herzegovina). Privately supporting, or at least not

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[50] Vesna Golić, Jelena's Choice, in: Irina Subotić / Irina Ljubić, eds, Jelena Šantić, Belgrade 2005, 169-221, 211-213. Soon after Kosovo became an international protectorate, more than two hundred thousand displaced Serbs and Roma flooded Serbia proper. In the absence of official aid and support for the refugees, Šantić and her colleagues from Group 484 (a local NGO founded in 1995 to assist refugees then fleeing Krajina and the Croatian Army's Operation Storm) organised the distribution of humanitarian aid to refugees from Kosovo immediately after the bombing campaign ended.

[51] Interview with D.D., 26 June 2013.

[52] Interview with M.T., 28 October 2013.

[53] Dragović-Soso, The Impact of International Intervention, 126.

opposing, an intervention was one thing. Supporting it publicly was something else, and certainly a risk: but this viewpoint did exist and was voiced.

The founder and then the director of the Humanitarian Law Centre and the director of the Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Serbia were among those who did not add their names to the appeal and even criticised it. As the former stated:

> 'I refused to sign the letter. I thought it should have been sent to Milošević because everything was in his hands. He could have stopped the bombing by negotiating and signing an agreement but he refused. While people in Serbia were looking at the sky waiting for bombs to fall, the situation in Kosovo was different; Serbian forces used the NATO campaign to expel Albanians, to kill, torture, and imprison them.'[54]

The former director of the Humanitarian Law Centre was among the few from those circles who were actually present in Kosovo during the bombing in order to document the crimes committed against the Albanian population.

> 'I travelled to Kosovo then to see what was happening […]. I saw it with my own eyes, and I could not understand how it was possible that people [in Serbia] did not want to see the truth. Everyone in Serbia spoke about the victims of the NATO bombing but no one would speak about Serbia's victims […]. Milošević wanted and succeeded to create more fear, and to have people feel more like victims, to show everyone that Serbs are victims—to put pressure on the people here […]. The problem was that people did not see what was going on only 300 kilometres away [from Belgrade].'[55]

The Bombing and the War in Kosovo

What emerges quite strongly from the data collected is indeed the distance and lack of awareness among ordinary people in Serbia with regard to the events that had taken place in Kosovo in 1998 and 1999. Many in Serbia felt the bombing campaign had no connection to the war in Kosovo and the crimes committed against Albanians. As one interviewee explained,

> 'The NATO bombing in Serbia is often addressed as if it had nothing to do with [the war in] Kosovo. Trying to contextualise the whole event, you immediately risk being attacked. For me the NATO bombing is not an isolated conflict, but rather, it was part of a long conflict that began already in the late 1980s.'[56]

I argue that this gap in perceptions and in the narratives of the war events continues into the present and is key to understanding the current mnemonic battles in Serbia, as well as postwar Serb–Albanian and Serbia–Kosovo relations.

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[54] Interview with S.B., 20 August 2004.
[55] Interview with N.K., 20 August 2004.
[56] Interview with M.T., 28 October 2013.

More than anything else, the differences in age group and in political and civic engagements among the study's respondents at the time of the NATO campaign are most fully crystallised regarding this matter. Those collected memories offer evidence of almost diametrically opposed groups: those who, on the one hand, knew nothing about what was happening in Kosovo, about the war, and war crimes and ethnic cleansing—or in some cases knew of these things yet framed the bombing as being completely disconnected from the war in Kosovo; and those who, on the other hand, possessed a greater awareness of the events that had taken place in Kosovo, either through direct witness or via the reports of the free media. The raising of awareness among some of the young participants of this study resulted in several of them taking firm positions against the war in Kosovo, which then resulted in the bombing being framed in a completely different light.

Then and now, Kosovo has remained a distant, unfamiliar, even unimportant place for many people in Serbia.[57] The study participants who were teenagers during the bombing spoke openly about not only their lack of knowledge but also about lack of interest in Kosovo. One stated,

> 'I cannot say that in my mind the Kosovo story can fit into the [story of the] NATO bombing. I do know people there [in Kosovo] see it [the bombing] as liberation, it must be nice to feel liberated, and yet for me bombing is an unacceptable way to deal with [contested] territories.'[58]

Another participant who came of age after the NATO campaign explained that he had then believed that Yugoslavia was being bombed only because of Milošević and his regime. He did not know what had happened a few years earlier in Croatia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, or Kosovo. The events were confusing, and only later, after the 2000 regime change in Serbia, did he become more informed:

> 'The moment when I realised what was happening in Kosovo [during the 1990s] and why we were bombed in the first place only took place a number of years after 1999. I was then working with one NGO in a project assisting IDPs [internally displaced persons] and refugees in Serbia getting their documents and gaining civic rights. I then met people who worked on investigating war crimes in Kosovo. They were all very informed about what had been happening in Kosovo since 1998 […]. I only then realised that these were war crimes. Prior to that I was very supportive of and influenced by the student demonstrations in 1996-97. They were against Milošević and his regime, but not quite clearly against his policies. It was a melting pot of ideas, you could see a rainbow flag, a US or British flag and even a Četnik flag, but they did not protest against war crimes.'[59]

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[57] This argument was outlined in an earlier paper: Orli Fridman, Structured Encounters in Post-Conflict / Post-Yugoslav Days. Visiting Belgrade and Prishtina, in: Olivera Simić / Zala Volčič, eds, Transitional Justice and Civil Society in the Balkans, New York 2013, 143-162.

[58] Interview with N.S., 9 October 2013.

[59] Interview with A.O., 25 April 2013.

Some participants who were of adult age during the bombing spoke about the difficulty of staying informed. As one participant, at the time a university student, recalls:

> 'We did not have internet [access] and we did not have enough information about what was really going on in Kosovo. The media here only reported about the attacks of the KLA against Serbian police, military, or civilians. After I learned about the killing of the KLA leader Adem Jashari[60] and his family, I remember feeling shocked […]. I did not like him but when I heard the police killed children and old people, it made me wonder "what were the police doing there anyway".'[61]

One participant had visited Kosovo during the war as a journalist working for a Belgrade-based independent media outlet. Even as an informed reporter, she admitted how difficult it had been to follow or grasp what was exactly going on. Her first visit to Kosovo was after the Jashari massacre in March 1998, about one year before the NATO bombing began. To her surprise, Serbian journalists were prohibited by Serbian security forces to leave Pristina and were, in fact, confined to the Grand Hotel in the city centre. 'Denial' was the word she kept using in reference to the entire period, from before the bombing to well after. She also problematises the silences she encountered:

> 'My friends and family completely disregarded the fact that I was there [in Kosovo], they were not interested. There was no silence because I spoke about it all the time, but it was like I was talking to deaf people. You could see that people simply could not take it anymore. They were focused on their daily survival because the economic situation was so bad […]. It was not just their lack of interest, people were already exhausted and over their heads with what was happening [over a decade of crisis and war].'[62]

Silence

While I was searching for participants for the study, for people who would be willing to speak about their memories of living through the bombing, my requests for an interview were met with either surprise and eventual acceptance, or polite refusal. When placing these memories in the context of current public mnemonic battles in Serbia, as discussed above, the voicing or silencing of the

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[60] This related to the massacre of fifty-one members of the insurgent Jashari family killed in Prekaz on March 1998 while fighting against Serbian troops. Anna Di Lellio / Stephanie Schwander-Sievers, The Legendary Commander. The Construction of an Albanian Master-Narrative in Post-War Kosovo, *Nations and Nationalism* 12, no. 3 (2006), 513-529, 513-516, DOI: 10.1111/j.1469-8129.2006.00252.x. While the massacre and Adem Jashari himself has grown into a myth in Kosovo Albanian societies, many people in Serbia have never heard of the massacre or of others, on even a larger scale, perpetrated by Serbian forces in 1998 and 1999.

[61] Interview with M.T., 28 October 2013.

[62] Interview with M.S., 31 October 2013.

experience of the bombing brings up almost opposing practices. The bombing campaign is either overemphasised for the purpose of gaining political points in the ongoing competition over victimisation and suffering, or the memories of this period are completely silenced.

Silence seems to take various forms for this study's participants. Self-imposed silence is most informative for understanding another layer of the dynamics among activists working on projects related to dealing with the past in Serbia. As one participant framed it,

> 'Civil society actors say "you have to remember we were bombed because of all the crimes we did in Kosovo" […] which immediately shuts down the conversation among us. I risk being labelled a nationalist if I say that the NATO bombing was an act of violence […] as if I am negating what Serbs did to Albanians in Kosovo.'[63]

Other explanations also help shed light on the silence. According to some participants, people do not speak about the bombing because they are overwhelmed with coping with other events or crimes. For others, silence helps to ensure distance from the question of responsibility. This contested question of responsibility is at the heart of the mnemonic battles currently being waged in Serbia. As Ivana Spasić has noted,

> 'Serbian responsibility in initiating the wars in former Yugoslavia is only sporadically identified; war crimes are still too often something that "has to be proven" or "was done by all sides."'[64]

Placing responsibility solely on Milošević for Serbia's involvement in the wars during the breakup of Yugoslavia, as well as blame for the failure to prevent the NATO airstrikes, has become a prominent sentiment within the hegemonic collective memory about the era.[65]

Some participants also explained why they were hesitant to speak about the bombing campaign, which, they believed, was not the worst thing that happened in the former Yugoslavia in the 1990s, especially when compared with the shelling of Sarajevo, besieged for more than three years. One individual, an undergraduate student in 1999, was rather direct and critical.

> 'What makes me angry is that now everyone is acting like we [in Belgrade] spent three months in shelters with no food and no water, like we were champions of the siege of Sarajevo. But at the time we were going out, dining in restaurants, listening to rock concerts for free in the main city square.'[66]

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[63] Interview with O.S., 17 October 2013.

[64] Ivana Spasić, Overcoming the Past. Politics and Everyday Life in Serbia after Milošević, Association française d´études sur les Balkans, paper presented at the international conference "Études balkaniques: état des savoirs et pistes de recherche", Paris 19-20 December 2002, 10-11.

[65] Spasić, Overcoming the Past.

[66] Interview with M.T., 28 October 2013. Cf. Srđan Atanosovski's essay in this issue.

And yet even if there are such critical voices, some events and days are remembered as being filled with fear. These recollections have emerged to constitute another important theme of remembrance.

Fear

Fear, and the memory of the experience of it, point at some differences between the generations chosen to participate in this study. Almost all of those who were coming of age during the bombing campaign did not discuss fear, or at most scarcely spoke about it, while those who by then had reached adulthood discussed it at length when recalling how they had felt. They spoke of fear as a sense of not being able to guarantee the safety of their own kids and other loved ones, and they recalled their fear of the unknown, their fear of exhaustion resulting from a decade of crisis, and their fear about the way the NATO bombing strengthened the Milošević regime, which benefitted from the ways it fostered national homogeneity.[67]

In particular, most participants recollected feeling fear and a sense of threat in response to the bombings of the RTS (Radio Television Serbia) building[68] and of the Chinese embassy. Some spoke about fear when using public transportation on the bridges or when passing by the *Generalštab* building.[69] According to the participant who avoided the draft, there was greater fear among young men of the military draft (and of being sent straight to Kosovo) than of the NATO airstrikes.[70]

Additional Themes Remembered

In this section, albeit briefly for reasons of space, I will highlight several additional themes that have emerged in the collected data, which provide a broader view of the scope of memories regarding the bombing campaign. Each of them can and indeed should be further analysed in the possible future development of this study. Most participants highlighted the uniqueness of

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[67] Interview with D.D., 26 June 2013.

[68] Mentioning the sacrifice of the victims who did not receive the instructions to evacuate the building in time.

[69] A comprehensive analysis of the *Generalštab* as the biography of the building is available in Ben Davenport, 'A Heritage of Resistance'–The Changing Meanings of Belgrade's Generalštab, in: Marie Louise Stig Sorensen / Dacia Viejo Rosa, eds, War and Cultural Heritage. Biographies of Place, Cambridge 2015, 156-182. Additionally, transcripts of a public event that took place at the cultural centre Rex in October 2013 are available at: Nebojša Milikić / Irena Šentevska, eds, Generalni štab javnog pamćenja: seminar za svakoga: ruina među nama [General Headquarters of Public Memory. Seminar for Everyone. The Ruin among Us], Belgrade 2014.

[70] Interview with V.M., 28 October 2013.

the interpersonal relations among their families, friends, and even neighbours during the months of the bombing. Younger participants remembered those months as an extended vacation, because there was no school and plenty of time to play, watch films (participants mentioned great films shown in the wee hours of the night on Serbian TV), or attend plays at the theatre and films at the cinema for only one dinar! While participants spoke about remembering a sense that the city sustained its routine ways of life during the daytime, they recall nighttime as the time when most of the bombings took place (though there were airstrikes in Niš during the day as well as at night, as one resident living there at the time discussed at length). Some recollected the nights of the bombing as a time when there were great parties in Belgrade, though others were slightly cynical about highlighting this as their main memory. Only two participants took part in the demonstrations on bridges, whose participants wore T-shirts decorated with a target symbol. Those who were teenagers at the time now remember the demonstrations and the use of target symbols mostly as a bizarre experience, while the antiwar activists of the period remember it as a form of public manipulation perpetuated by the regime.[71]

Conditions in Belgrade varied by location, and the study's participants pointed to the differences in experiences between residents in the city centre and those on the centre's outskirts (in some cases nearer to military targets). Hence, alongside the memories of experiencing daily life without water or electricity, respondents also highlighted their memories of feeling as if they were living inside a movie or a video game, especially when recollecting their views of the city from their living-room windows when bombs were falling.

Closing Remarks

The memories presented here constitute an initial step in the analysis of the collected and collective memory of the NATO bombing that is currently being constructed in Serbia. As in all processes involving the construction of collective memories, the memories of the wars of the 1990s in Serbia and specifically of the bombing continue to be formed, shaped, and contested according to the needs of the present—a process that will be moulded and evolve in years to come as well. In a city where the relics of bombed buildings still stand, there

[71] Milić has analysed the 'We Are All Targets' postcard available in newsstands in Belgrade after the bombing. According to her, the target sign lets its Serbian reader/viewer remember with pride the righteous resistance of Serbs during the days of NATO bombing, and does not address the silence of which this testimony spoke. Even more so, it highlights the Serbian trauma but omits completely the Kosovar Albanian trauma, and it negates other traumas and victims, including Albanians and even Serb refugees. Milić, From Serbia with Hate, 344-345.

is nonetheless silence about the nuances of these memories, side by side with those voices framing the bombing as the ultimate symbol of victimhood.

The memories of the 1999 NATO bombing as remembered by residents of Belgrade shed light on several themes and dynamics related to this essay's initial topic of inquiry: the experiences of international interventions from the receiving end and their contributions to our understanding of the case study of Serbia and the Western Balkans, and how this case study contributes to broader discussions on interventions.

Looking first at the former, the collection and analysis of the memories of the bombing help broaden the scope of local narratives about this period. It allows the analysis to go beyond the narratives of victimisation and silence; it opens an array of experiences and perceptions, from the very personal memories of fear, of specific interpersonal relations, and of responding with dark humour, to the political discussions related to the breakup of Yugoslavia, the wars of the 1990s, and the war in Kosovo in particular.

The gap between the realities in Serbia and Kosovo, and the way these experiences have shaped present memories as presented above, are crucial for understanding the present mnemonic battles in Serbia as well as postwar Serb–Albanian and Serbia–Kosovo relations. In this sense, the positions of those who did not oppose NATO's intervention and who even supported it contribute to discussions about not only responsibility but also empathy (or the lack of it) and compassion towards the other in times of conflict and crisis. In this case, empathy towards Albanians in Kosovo is almost completely absent from local discussions in Serbia. The hegemonic narrative in Serbia is currently built on memories of victimisation—which not only forecloses in advance the scope of those discussions but also minimises the space where one can voice empathy towards Albanians in Kosovo or learn about the war crimes perpetrated against them, let alone become engaged in any civic action about it.[72]

These memories may allow some possible openings for the broadening of conflict transformation processes, in the sense of reframing the relations between Serb and Albanian communities from Kosovo and Serbia by expanding their narratives of the recent past. Bringing the collected and collective memories of the months of the bombing to the forefront of the discussion through an

[72] Very few discussions as such are present in public discourse and debate in Serbia. One exception was an art installation about the massacre of the Bogujevci family in the town of Podujevo and its aftermath, which was presented in Belgrade in December 2013. Prime Minister Dačić's attendance at the exhibition's opening was covered by local media, and it might have opened a space for empathy with the victims. However, some critics would claim that local politicians such as Dačić (or Tadić before him) tend to relativise their statements and equalise all victims, which shuts down any possible discussion of responsibility. Cf. Marija Ristić, Serbia PM Shows up at Kosovo Massacre Exhibition, *Balkan Insight*, 19 December 2013, http://www.balkaninsight.com/en/article/kosovo-art-show-opens-in-belgrade-amid-protests.

accounting of their experience by residents of Belgrade—younger or older, politically active or less engaged—allows not only for there to be a bridge forged between social memory studies and the study conflict transformation, but also for a greater understanding of the multiplicity of otherwise absent narratives.

As for the contribution of this analysis to the broader discussions on interventions, those lessons on international interventions learned from the receiving end, point to the limitation of such military campaigns, and the resulting blind spots that complex local/internal realities create, and sometimes even freeze in place, directly after these sorts of actions. As one participant summed up the matter: 'The problem with military interventions is that they never hurt those whom they were meant to hurt.'[73] Any account of the lessons learned from the case of Serbia, therefore, should emphasise how the bombing campaign weakened the nation's civil society. These lessons are crucial to the rethinking of the sort of impact that international interventions exercise on local political and socio-cultural processes. As one participant recalls:

> 'After the bombing, Milošević was no longer busy with Kosovo Albanians but rather then became busy with us—those opposing him. NATO did not bring the change we hoped for, Milošević was still very strong!'[74]

This prompts the questions: What visions can international military interventions offer for the day after they end? And in the lack of such visions, what is the impact of such policy strategies on the local politics and legacies that remain, extending years and indeed decades into the future?

The present reality in Serbia and the legacies of the past, including those of the bombing, have significantly shaped the memories analysed here. The sense is that after all that happened in the 1990s, nationalism survived—and is, in fact, thriving. The present atmosphere in a country still currently governed by the political elites of the late 1990s guarantees, as another participant concluded, that people neglect to reflect upon their memories.

CORRESPONDING AUTHOR

Orli Fridman Faculty of Media and Communications (FMK), Singidunum University & School for International Training (SIT), Study Abroad, Karadjordjeva 65, 11000 Belgrade, Serbia.
E-mail: orli.fridman@fmk.edu.rs

[73] Interview with M.S., 31 October 2013.
[74] Interview with M.T., 28 October 2013.