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MASTER THESIS

TOPIC: Memory Politics as an Obstacle to Reconciliation

Case Study – Bosnia and Herzegovina

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

BiH – Bosnia and Herzegovina

DPA – Dayton Peace Agreement

GFAP - General Framework Agreement for Peace in Bosnia and Herzegovina

ICG – International Crisis Group

IEBL - Inter-Entity Boundary Line

OHR – Office of the High Representative

RS – Republika Srpska

UN – United Nations

UNGA – United Nations General Assembly

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INTRODUCTION

Looking at the general political developments in Bosnia and Herzegovina over the past two decades, and confirmed by the political and social representatives, and the ordinary people consulted during the process of development of this thesis, there has been a slow but steady and persistent political deterioration of the situation within the country, in particular regarding the inter-ethnic relations, the very core of the problem that led to the devastating war.

After the initial optimism, as experienced by many, or feeling of threat of international intervention and consequential reservations and calculations by the political representatives in that regard, there seems to be an agreement that from some point at the second half of the first decade of the 21st century, the overall situation started backsliding, and that the trend is now in the process of reaching its repeated negative culminations, with some perceived climax waiting ahead.¹

Indeed, one thing that can be asserted for Bosnia and Herzegovina today is that it is faced with a big political and social crisis, which, coupled with economic problems and, let us not forget here, major corruption², results in a creation of atmosphere of disillusion and hopelessness, stimulating especially young people to leave the country³. Some parts of Bosnia and Herzegovina can already sound the alarms regarding growing depopulation, most specifically in the very Srebrenica that they all so strongly stand for.⁴

The memory of the suffering has been recognised as a powerful tool in maintaining divisions created by the war, and it has been claimed by the politics for the purpose of pursuing ethnic mobilisation and other goals (cynics would also say, and very often be right – pursuing their own

¹ A recurring statement in the interviews conducted for this paper.

² "BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA WORST IN THE REGION ACCORDING TO THE CORRUPTION PERCEPTION INDEX", Transparency International – Bosnia and Herzegovina on 31.1.2023: <https://ti-bih.org/bosnia-and-herzegovina-worst-in-the-region-according-to-the-corruption-perception-index-bih-completely-devasted-by-corruption-the-situation-is-getting-worse/?lang=en>

³ "Zašto mladi ljudi odlaze iz BiH i zašto se ne vraćaju?" (*Why do young people leave BiH and why do they not return?*), Al Jazeera Balkans on 10.10.2022: <https://balkans.aljazeera.net teme/2022/10/10/zasto-idu-i-zasto-se-u-bih-ne-vracaju-mladi-ljudi>

⁴ Town of Srebrenica is assessed to have 700-800 full-time residents, and the whole municipality not more than 5,000, which is 7 to 8 times less than before the war, and around 3 times less than 15 years ago. Interview with a member of the municipal administration in Srebrenica, 11.5.2024.

personal interests and benefits masked as matters of highest importance for the ethnic community)⁵.

Gradually, the commemorative events and the commemorative stages have as well come to serve to politicians as places for their performances designed to flock and homogenise their respective ethnic electorates around the identity issues of maximum importance, at the same time doing themselves a fair share of self-promotion. Over time, the commemorative events, as well as culture of remembrance in general, and the memory politics as pursued by the key ethnic political elites, have become a new battlefield, and the war victims, as inconsiderate as it may sound, have become the weapons in their hands.

Last year, 2024, was particularly good to draw the line and try to analyse the situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina from this perspective. The whole public debate over the adoption of the Srebrenica Resolution at the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) just showed the magnitude of the dividing potential that the memory has in Bosnia and Herzegovina (including the implications in the whole region). Acknowledging that there was a lot of manipulation, it strikes that the whole debate deepened the divisions within Bosnia and Herzegovina, and aside from the satisfaction for the victims (and political satisfaction for the Resolution promoters), the only directly perceivable result is damage to peace process and inter-ethnic relations between Serbs and Bosniaks, whose mistrust has been strengthened, while their potential reconciliation has been extended further into the future.⁶

Looking from this perspective, it is clear that memory politics plays a crucial role in furthering of divisions and inter-ethnic spat, negatively impacting the prospects for a longer-term stabilisation, inter-ethnic reconciliation, and in general – peace in Bosnia and Herzegovina. These topics and debates seem to involve in themselves all the key aspects and tactics of promoting divisions, and quake the social and political landscape of the country, making it very difficult to actively oppose and influence the positive change. The implications are not only internal, but also external, as they spill over and spread the debate to the neighbouring countries, causing regional instability.

⁵ See: Johan Galtung, *Mirnim sredstvima do mira* (2009), p. 322

⁶ The interviews conducted in the period of April and May 2024 especially show the high level of concern and anxiety among the local population in Podrinje area (Interviews #8-10, #17-19, #54, #55, #58, and #59)

During the campaign/debate for and against the adoption of the UNGA Srebrenica Resolution, there was a notable and reported rise of tensions, and the spreading of fear among the local population in several areas, particularly, but not limited to the Srebrenica area. Many people voiced their concerns over what was going on, wondering whether a war was possible again.⁷ Whether it is a result of manipulation or just a genuine concern as a result of exposure to a heated public political debate, the very fact that ordinary population sees the war as a realistic threat is a huge defeat for the international peacebuilding project, as well as for the local political and social elites.

Memory politics stepped in, reined to serve the continuation of the conflict cycles, turning the field of culture of remembrance in general into a form of a battlefield, where the opposing ethno-politics fight, win, lose or prolong the battles in the war fought by other means. Poking into the people's emotions, wounds and scars from the recent war, and stepping on the respective identities that are being constructed around the war related narratives, these create deeper divisions between the ethnic groups, pushing aside or totally disabling (sparse?) real efforts toward some form of reconciliation. Along with it, they affect the very foundations of peace, testing its endurance, or fragility, and, as noted in the above example of Srebrenica Resolution debate, strengthen the fears and anxieties about a potential new outbreak of violent hostilities.

It is the aim of this research to identify and analyse in more detail how this process is taking shape, and to take stock of the situation on the ground at this point in time. In order to answer the research question "how the memory politics and the memorialisation practices affect the process of reconciliation", this paper looks on both political and individual levels, to see how memory is used to further divisions, and how these strategies resonate on the ground, among the ordinary population. The main focus is on the effect that such practices have on the process of reconciliation and progress of the peace agenda in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

The first two chapters will provide an overview of the consulted literature, first in relation to the issues of reconciliation, and the second in relation to the memory politics. They will present the background theoretical context to this research. Chapter 3 explains the theoretical framework,

⁷ Also ICG: „Violence is possible, especially in ethnically mixed areas, though it is unlikely in the near term.“, 23 May 2024 *Helping Keep Bosnia Together*, Watch List 2024 for the EU, Spring Update p. 1

outlining the scope within of the analysis of the content collected in this research, while Chapter 4 presents the research methodology.

The main part of this paper provides an overview of the collected data and topics, grouped per location, rather than topics, as the specific locations feature in the public discourse. It looks into the specific examples of the culture of remembrance and analyses the ways in which it affects the public and individual spheres. After the presentation of the locally identified issues where memory plays an important role in creating animosity and divisions, the final part gives some observations related to the perceptions on the individual level, based on the conducted interviews.

Conclusion part summarizes the key findings, confirming that the memory politics plays a critical role in the process of identity formation within the three ethnicities in Bosnia and Herzegovina, using memory to maintain and strengthen the division and the definition of the respective ethnic groups in the opposition to the other. Along with several other noted factors, it helps strengthening the animosity, deepen the ethnic divide, thus obstructing the process of reconciliation, and preventing Bosnia and Herzegovina from transition toward a more stable and peaceful society.

1. LITERATURE REVIEW

1.1. RECONCILIATION

Both theory and research stress the ambiguity of the term 'reconciliation' itself, noting that there is a level of „confusion that still surrounds the term“,⁸ particularly in regard to it denoting a process or an end result (process – as steps towards conclusion, and outcome – as repaired relationship⁹). What kind of process, and whether a process at all, or does it describe a state of relationships at the end of a process.¹⁰ It has been recognised as consisting of „mutual recognition and acceptance, invested interests and goals in developing peaceful relations and mutual trust“¹¹, or as „a process through which a society moves from a divided past into a shared future“. ¹² It deals with establishing „a new type of relationships“¹³, dealing with „unreconciled relationships... built on distrust, suspicions, fear, accusation“ toward a system „based on respect for human rights.“¹⁴

In this context, the term 'coexistence' can be used to mark a stage in the process – the one preceding „building of confidence and trust“ and „moving towards empathy“¹⁵, or within the frame of positive peace as „positive coexistence“¹⁶, or as „a process whereby reconciliation is achieved“. ¹⁷ Coexistence is seen as „living side by side, not engaging in violence.“¹⁸ Within the scope of reconciliation or coexistence, Bloomfield describes ranges of markers between the poles of „thick or thin“,¹⁹ to define different phases of the process and their characteristics, with varying degrees of tolerance involved.²⁰ Process or end result, reconciliation „entails a very wide

⁸ Bloomfield, David, *On Good Terms: Clarifying Reconciliation* (2006), p. 3

⁹ Kostovicova, Denisa, *Reconciliation by Stealth* (2023), p. 7

¹⁰ Bloomberg, op. cit., p. 3

¹¹ Bloomfield, ibid., p. 6

¹² Bloomfield, ibid., p. 7

¹³ Bloomfield, ibid., p. 8

¹⁴ Bloomfield, ibid., p. 9

¹⁵ Bloomfield, ibid., p. 13

¹⁶ Bloomfield, ibid., p. 14

¹⁷ Bloomfield, ibid., p. 15

¹⁸ Strupskiene, Lina, *What is Reconciliation and Are We There Yet?* (2016), p. 454

¹⁹ Strupskiene, ibid., p. 453; Eastmond, Marita, *Reconciliation, Reconstruction and Everyday Life in War-Torn Societies* (2010), p. 5, Kostovicova, op. cit., p. 7

²⁰ Strupskiene, ibid., p. 454

range of questions and dilemmas,²¹ towards reaching a level of „friendly relations“, and „signal of readiness for reconciliation“.²²

The other type of differentiation within the sphere of reconciliation is related to the levels at which it is perceived to take place, and whether we deal with the „political, social, or economic level“, or „individual, communal, or national“.²³ As „violent conflict and its aftermath... (produces) by nature a degree of confused, emotional and apparently non-rational thinking“,²⁴ it affects all segments of society and reflects specifically on each level. In approaching each of them, one has to be mindful of the specifics, as, for example, political reconciliation may be seen as „less deep, less personal and more pragmatic“,²⁵ and „not dependent on any kind of intimacy“,²⁶ but at the same time it is perceived as „a vital ingredient of the peacebuilding.“²⁷ As the case of Bosnia and Herzegovina also shows, the interdependence between the political and social/individual levels may dictate the progress (or regress) of the peace process itself, with mutual influence or friction between „universalist reconciliation discourse and the particular local realities.“²⁸

On the other hand, things seem to be much clearer when it comes to the notion of what reconciliation process includes, or what are the different fields that need to be addressed in order to work towards reconciliation. They are basically concerned about the ways how to right the wrongs, „heal the trauma“,²⁹ and how to enable the process of confidence building and healing, which puts the victims of the violations of human rights into the centre. Therefore, here we hear about truth, justice, forgiveness and healing³⁰, inter-communal relationship building processes that also involve reparations³¹, as well as „national top-down approaches – truth commissions, legal processes and reform, reparation programs and public apologies.“³² They may include

²¹ Strupskiene, *ibid.*, p. 467

²² Ingrao, Charles and Emmert, Thomas A., *Confronting the Yugoslav Controversies* (2009), p. 398

²³ Strupskiene, *op. cit.*, p. 453

²⁴ Bloomfield, *op. cit.*, p. 5

²⁵ Bloomfield, *ibid.*, p. 11

²⁶ Bloomfield, *ibid.*, p. 10

²⁷ Bloomfield, *ibid.*, p. 30

²⁸ Eastmond, *op. cit.*, p. 6

²⁹ Strupskiene, *op. cit.*, p. 456

³⁰ Bloomfield, *op. cit.*, p. 12

³¹ Bloomfield, *ibid.*, p. 13

³² Bloomfield, *ibid.*, p. 25

„structural initiatives changes to the system of governance and institutional change“³³ and „cultural initiatives ... (operating on) a broad community level involving people who do not wield significant official political power“.³⁴ These assumptions also recognise functioning state institutions and rule of law as prerequisites for reconciliation.³⁵

Justice is most often stressed as a key precondition for a successful move in the direction of reconciliation. Past wrongs are the ones that present the main obstacle, indeed the main reason for the inter-communal splits. Such „unreconciled issues from the past violence never disappear simply by default“³⁶, and they need to be dealt with. There appears to be an agreement that „bringing justice to bear on past misdeeds is one of the most effective means to build a guarantee against future violence.“³⁷

Transitional justice thus takes central place, along with its implications of order and morality,³⁸ and comes in forms of retributive and restorative, regulatory and social justice.³⁹ It connects strongly to the understanding of the needs and care for the victims, to the extent that „any compromise especially at the behest of strengthening a reconciliation process at the expense of justice, will thus treat the victims unfairly.“⁴⁰ However, there may be no direct link between transitional justice and reconciliation, though some victims do connect (condition?) reconciliation with transitional justice.⁴¹

Transitional justice is seen as an important part of the process of facing the past,. In that sense, Perica insists that „without justice and facing the past, and stepping away for the ethnic nationalist ideologies by their promoters, there cannot be a full healing of sick states and peoples“.⁴² According to this line of argument, „in theory, reconciliation can only come with facing the scientifically and legally established facts and through justice.“⁴³ On the other hand, there should also be some caution, as „pursuit of post-conflict justice through different

³³ Bloomfield, *ibid.*, p. 27

³⁴ Bloomfield, *ibid.*, p. 27

³⁵ Strupskiene, *op. cit.*, p. 460

³⁶ Bloomfield, *op. cit.*, p. 9

³⁷ Bloomfield, *ibid.*, p. 9

³⁸ Bloomfield, *ibid.*, p. 17

³⁹ Bloomfield, *ibid.*, p. 21

⁴⁰ Bloomfield, *ibid.*, p. 22

⁴¹ Eastmond, *op. cit.*, p. 7

⁴² Perica, Vjekoslav, *Pomirenje i posljednji dani* (2021), p. 7

⁴³ Perica, *ibid.*, p. 24

mechanisms further antagonises ethnic groups previously involved in conflict and stymies post-conflict reconciliation.⁴⁴

Kostovicova offers arguments in favour of transitional justice promoting reconciliation through consultations within truth commissions framework.⁴⁵ Along with the transitional justice and establishment of facts through court cases or other justice mechanisms, truth commissions are seen as a complementary, or sometimes as a replacement mechanism for truth seeking. Truth commissions have been used or attempted with different degree of success depending on the specifics of the individual cases. Nevertheless, there seems to be an imperative that „only when the complete truth from all perspectives is known“⁴⁶ – I would add – and accepted, there could be grounds for reconciliation.

Closely tied to the justice and truth-seeking processes, and as an important milestone in the process of or toward reconciliation is the concept of forgiveness. Including in the Bosnian and Herzegovinian context, it can often be heard that the victims „will forgive but never forget“.⁴⁷ „Reconciliation process aims to make forgiveness possible“⁴⁸ – but not through the pressure on the victims. As a matter of fact, forgiveness needs to happen „at the discretion of the victims“ and it is something that „the offenders must earn“.⁴⁹ Victims may be faced with a necessity to make compromises, though it may strike as problematic if they are to „forgive perpetrators without having first gained sufficient justice for their suffering.“⁵⁰

Process of or towards reconciliation can also be advanced by way of public apologies, though, as will be referred to later, along with the truth seeking by methods alternative to transitional justice, have not had much success in the case of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Ignoring of the suffering and manipulations with suffering stand in the way of reconciliation, hence the need for honest apologies, but as noted in the 2019 UN report, the apologies would need to be consulted thoroughly before they are to be made.⁵¹ Another important assisting mechanism is education,

⁴⁴ Kostovicova, op. cit., p. 6

⁴⁵ Kostovicova, ibid., p. 6

⁴⁶ Leonard et al, op. cit., p. 11

⁴⁷ Bloomfield, op. cit., p. 23

⁴⁸ Bloomfield, ibid., p. 23

⁴⁹ Bloomfield, ibid., p. 24

⁵⁰ Bloomfield, ibid., p. 7

⁵¹ United Nations General Assembly, *Promotion of Truth, Justice, Reparation and Guarantees of Non-Reccurence, Report of the Special Rapporteur* (2019), p. 19

fair enough, but as noted further in this text, not the option at disposal in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Still, it should be noted that „education reforms have the greatest potential to take on a transformational agenda.“⁵²

In more general terms, and of direct relevance for analysis of the case of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Hughes and Kostovicova point to other important factors that have impact on the overall setting and the dynamics of reconciliation. In this regard it is worth highlighting that there are „conflicts that ended messily with no clear winner, and in these cases often we see institutionalised structural ethnic divisions in forms of power sharing that is pushed on domestic elites by external powers, leading to the embedding of ethnic divisions in political structures.“⁵³ This perceived negative influence by external factors can trigger notions among the local actors through the „vague use and politicised impositions of the concepts... (representing) combinations of interests and global justice norms.“⁵⁴ As a consequence, „the grassroots levels among the communities that are supposed to be object of the process“⁵⁵ tend to view reconciliation and justice as irony.

It seems that in the case of Bosnia and Herzegovina, after each above sentence, one may add a comment: „And here’s where there is a problem in Bosnia and Herzegovina“. Cynicism aside, it is not difficult to argue that, along with the remarks in the previous part related to general peace context, the situation with reconciliation is equally problematic, following roughly the same or similar argumentation and patterns. Therefore, one may point out that the process of reconciliation suffers under the same pressure of nationalistic manipulation with inter-ethnic divide, enabled by the economic hardships,⁵⁶ or that the international interventionism numbed and passivized the local actors. At the same time, ethnic homogenisation contributes to (albeit a false) feeling of inter-communal security, while the OHR interventions helped (Bosniak) minority returnees in the RS feel safer.⁵⁷

⁵² Friedman, Orli, *Memory Activism and Digital Practices after Conflict* (2022), p. 86

⁵³ Hughes, James and Kostovicova, Denisa (editors), *Rethinking Reconciliation and Transitional Justice after Conflict* (2019), p. 4

⁵⁴ Hughes, Kostovicova, *ibid.*, p. 4

⁵⁵ Hughes, Kostovicova, *ibid.*, p. 4

⁵⁶ Strupskiene, *op. cit.*, p. 461

⁵⁷ Strupskiene, *ibid.*, p. 465

Overall impression regarding peacebuilding in Bosnia and Herzegovina could be that „while much attention has been paid to reconstruction of infrastructure and the establishment of the rule of law, little thought has been given to what is required at the day to day level in order to restore the sense of interpersonal security.“⁵⁸ „In terms of external involvement and money spent“, peacebuilding in Bosnia and Herzegovina is seen as the most comprehensive project of the sort thus far (*but also „a template for experiments“*)⁵⁹. There was some undeniable progress, but it often came as response to conditionality imposed from the outside.⁶⁰

Minority return took place, with more or less success depending on the specific locations, but the process of inter-ethnic reconciliation, or more modestly put – coexistence, has remained trapped in some interim state, challenged on a regular basis by the inflammatory rhetoric, or by inability to push the processes forward toward further raising of standards and general acceptance of the ethnic 'other' as truly equal. Again, the problems came from the encouraged group identity⁶¹, and „the greatest obstacle to reconciliation was the presence of nationalistic/xenophobic and ethnocentric attitudes, with negative stereotypes of the opposing nation.“⁶² Coupled with the sense of discrimination, the continuing forms of segregation still pose challenges to reconciliation.⁶³

Transitional justice failed to make a deeper impact regarding the creation of closer narratives, so that everyone still feels they were not the ones „who wanted the war, but 'they', so we had to defend ourselves.“⁶⁴ It was embraced as a key strategy⁶⁵, though it is occasionally disputed. There is an overall dissatisfaction or frustration with the results of retributive transitional justice, which surfaces regularly through complaints from all sides, including mutual accusations of unwillingness to admit „the real truth“.⁶⁶

⁵⁸ Ingrao, Emmert, op. cit., p. 394

⁵⁹ Eastmond, op. cit., p. 4

⁶⁰ Soso p. 193

⁶¹ Leonard et al., op. cit., p. 7

⁶² Ingrao, Emmert, op. cit., p. 398

⁶³ Hughes, Kostovicova, op.cit.p. 13

⁶⁴ Ingrao, Emmert, op. cit., p. 399

⁶⁵ Eastmond, op. cit. p. 6

⁶⁶ „Otvoreno pismo Smitu za Hrvate, nema pomirenja bez jednake pravde“, (*Open letter to Schmidt for Croats, there is no reconciliation without equal justice*), Glas Srpske daily, 17.6.2023. p. 3

Attempts to establish a truth commission have not succeeded either. Despite occasional mobilisation of international, and to a certain extent also local actors, and conferences and consultations, these attempts failed, for one reason or the other.⁶⁷

Civic peace activism, which was involved in all alternative initiatives toward the establishment of truth and reconciliation, were not so successful, and despite surviving on the public scene, their messages have always had a limited outreach. One attempt that was successful in producing results was the 2004 Srebrenica Commission, appointed by the RS Government, however, their findings were later cancelled and the RS Government proceeded with appointing another commission to revise the original report, amidst the criticism from the part of the IC and the Bosniak victims' associations.⁶⁸

On the other hand, a recent study stresses that some level of reconciliation has been achieved among the participants of consultations for RECOM initiative.⁶⁹ The argument presented here support the claim that the RECOM consultations repaired torn inter-ethnic relations of participants,⁷⁰ going further to note that „reconciliation can occur but remain undetected by scholars because of their theoretical and methodological choices.“⁷¹ Still the same Kostovicova reaffirms that „reconciliation also requires recognition of the ethnic other and their war time suffering“.⁷² A view optimistic as in glass half-full, and even though some relations have been repaired through this or other processes, the core problem remains – the inter-ethnic divide persists and grows in spite of these occasional *anomalies*, and the realistic view is not whether the glass is half full or half empty, but whether it has reached any half at all.

The ethnic division found its way into the education system and curricula as well. The education has essentially been ethnicized, and it is reflected in the curricula and textbooks. One such example is presented in the OSCE analysis of history textbooks, which basically provide three different views of the same events, and serve to develop „empathy only towards the victims of one's own group“.⁷³

⁶⁷ Ingrao, Emmert, op. cit., p. 413

⁶⁸ Tromp, Nevenka, *Promašeno presuđivanje povijesti na Haškom tribunalu* (2018), p. 3

⁶⁹ Kostovicova, op. cit., p.4

⁷⁰ Kostovicova, ibid., p. 4

⁷¹ Kostovicova, ibid. p. 4

⁷² Kostovicova, ibid., p. 14

⁷³ Karge, Heike, *Izveštaj o učenju i nastavi historije o periodu od 1992. do 1995.* (2022), p. 23

Perica stresses the need to recognise that the inter-ethnic divisions are a product of the recent history, promoted in the last 30 years by the political elites.⁷⁴ The argument here is that the fight against the divide is possible, noting some religious initiatives that helped improve relations in Croatia, involving the representatives of the Catholic Church and the Serb Orthodox Church.⁷⁵ However, when it comes to Bosnia and Herzegovina, such initiatives are lacking, and the messages vary and may cause confusion. It looks like the resolutions passed outside the country may be the sole specific attempts to act on the continuation of promotion of reconciliation through truth⁷⁶, though tarnished by the lack of general acceptance or having the same form of an outside imposition, which has been identified as one of the root problems in peacebuilding in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

It could be argued perhaps that the option of „forgetting“ was overlooked in the whole process, though at least political elites would be – at least partially – very interested in it. It seems that the current everlasting state of torture that Bosnia and Herzegovina is in is not producing much positive result. One interesting remark is worth noting here – „there is the option of 'natural amnesia at one end of the spectrum, and at the other end, there is a corrosive permanent state of contesting the past and prosecuting past behaviour, depending on the political balance of power at any given time. The danger for reconciliation and transitional justice approaches is that they do not help end a conflict, but rather the processes themselves become instruments to continue the conflict.“⁷⁷ Some creative balance may be necessary if Bosnia and Herzegovina is to be disentangled from this push and pull mechanism.

1.2 MEMORY AND THE MEMORY POLITICS

The topic of memory and memory politics have gained a lot more interest since the second half of the 20th century, particularly during the 1980s and the 1990s.⁷⁸ This rise in the interest for the memory came with the huge shifts in the world politics and the new state that were happening before and after the fall of the Berlin wall and the end of the cold war. It brought with it a

⁷⁴ Perica, op. cit., p. 6

⁷⁵ Perica, ibid., p. 16

⁷⁶ Perica, ibid., p. 33

⁷⁷ Hughes, Kostovicova, op. cit. p. 7

⁷⁸ Olick, Jeffrey K., and Robbins, Joyce, *Studije o drustvenom secanju*, in Sladecsek, Michal, Vasiljevic, Jelena, and Petrovic Trifunovic, Tamara, *Kolektivno secanje i politike pamcenja*, p. 89

developing research into the connections between history, memory and power, and analysing the competitiveness of different memories and instrumentalization of the past.⁷⁹

This resulted in an increasing trend of different commemorations and the interest and popularity in the commemorative events.⁸⁰ On the political plain, the increased interest in the memory brought to the reassessment of certain aspects of democracy, leading to the conviction that „healthy democracy is based on social remembrance of the past“⁸¹, which lead to the new evaluation of the individual national pasts and cultures.⁸²

Similar observations were made by numerous other authors into 2000s⁸³, noting that the word 'memory' started becoming more and more frequent in use, to the extent that it could even be said it has become 'fashionable'. Blight also notes „a widespread discussion about the very nature and validity of the narratives and knowledge as constructs.“⁸⁴ This analyses also questions the „noble dream“ of neutral narratives, and discusses doubts over the counter-narratives as tools used to build and maintain social and political power.⁸⁵

Tsvetan Todorov warned of the *proliferation* of the memory, and that this „obsession with the cult of memory... and nostalgia for the past that goes unstoppably farther away“⁸⁶ leads to more and more rituals and inauguration of more and more museums.⁸⁷

As another consequence of this new trend, historical and cultural sites become highly commercialised and financially supported as tourist attractions⁸⁸, while the phrase „Never Forget“ became a cliché of the time.⁸⁹ To remember started to „feel like a religious imperative“.⁹⁰ Consequently, with the rise of the interest in memory and its increased role in the public, social and political spheres, there have appeared more and more conflicts over the memory, and how to

⁷⁹ Olick and Robbins, *ibid.* p. 90

⁸⁰ Misztal, Barbara A., Sakralizacija secanja, in Sladecsek, Michal, Vasiljevic, Jelena, and Petrovic Trifunovic, Tamara, *Kolektivno secanje i politike pamcenja*, p. 297

⁸¹ Misztal, *ibid.*, p. 298

⁸² Misztal, *ibid.*, p. 298

⁸³ Blight, David W., Pomama za secanjem: zasto i zasto danas?, in Sladecsek, Michal, Vasiljevic, Jelena, and Petrovic Trifunovic, Tamara, *Kolektivno secanje i politike pamcenja*, p. 322

⁸⁴ Blight, *ibid.*, p. 322

⁸⁵ Blight, *ibid.*, p. 322

⁸⁶ Todorov, Tsvetan, Upotrebe pamcenja, in Sladecsek, Michal, Vasiljevic, Jelena, and Petrovic Trifunovic, Tamara, *Kolektivno secanje i politike pamcenja*, p. 181

⁸⁷ Todorov, *ibid.*, p. 181

⁸⁸ Blight, *op. cit.*, p. 328

⁸⁹ Blight, *ibid.*, p. 330

⁹⁰ Rieff, David, *In Praise of Forgetting* (2016), p. 77

remember. As Rieff notes – „In the early 21st century, there are few democratic societies that are not embroiled in their own memory wars, which have become arenas for competing martyrologies“.⁹¹ This problem is even more acute in the transitional societies, where „commemoration of violent events...is a conflictual, messy and multi-layered undertaking“,⁹² with different actors having „different perspectives on the same events“.⁹³

Again, as noted in the earlier sections, tightly entwined with the problems of peace and reconciliation, memory is very much about the issue of identity. Memory plays an important role in the formation of identities, and it is its component.⁹⁴ Like with the individual psychology, the group or collective identity also reaches into the past and „attempts to connect the past into a sensible story, to observe and evaluate it, so the memory must undoubtedly be recognised as a constituting factor of an autobiographical or narrative „I““.⁹⁵ The same goes for collective identities, which are, along with memory, constituted by „common goals, values or practices“.⁹⁶

These elements, from their side, „play an important role in the group cohesion“.⁹⁷ At the same time, identity plays another role, besides its descriptive quality. „Identity is not only a descriptive category, it is also a normative one, and part of its normative importance is in its being a source of values.“⁹⁸ In the context of this thesis, this touches on the core problem, on how identities or values defined in opposition to each other by different communities actually negate each other and serve as a source for antagonism and demonisation of the other. In relation to group cohesion, and in the contemporary context, „identity...can be regarded as a defensive reaction to globalisation, because it enhances the resistance of the community toward delocalised cultures.“⁹⁹

⁹¹ Rieff, *ibid.*, p. 105

⁹² Mannergren, Johanna, Bjorkdahl, Annika, Buckley-Zistel, Susanne, Kappler, Stefanie and Williams, Timothy, *Peace and the Politics of Memory* (2024), p. 1

⁹³ Jansen, Stef, *Remembering with a Difference*, in: Bougarel, Xavier, Helms, Elissa and Duijzings, Ger *The New Bosnian Mosaic* (2016), p. 207

⁹⁴ Sladecsek, Michal, Vasiljevic, Jelena, and Petrovic Trifunovic, Tamara, *Kolektivno secanje i politike pamcenja*, p. 10

⁹⁵ Sladecsek et al., *ibid* p. 10

⁹⁶ Sladecsek et al., *ibid* p. 10

⁹⁷ Le Gauff, Jacques, *Pamcenje*, in: Sladecsek, Michal, Vasiljevic, Jelena, and Petrovic Trifunovic, Tamara, *Kolektivno secanje i politike pamcenja* p. 114

⁹⁸ Blustein, Jeffrey, *Secanje kao predmet vrednosnog ispitivanja*, in: Sladecsek, Michal, Vasiljevic, Jelena, and Petrovic Trifunovic, Tamara, *Kolektivno secanje i politike pamcenja* p. 144

⁹⁹ Misztal, *op. cit.*, p. 308

However, identities are not necessarily based on the „empirically confirmed claims“¹⁰⁰. On the contrary, besides its particular limitations, „there is an element of arbitrariness“¹⁰¹ with the identity formation. Memory is there to group together, „to maintain the continuity in the collective and individual experience“.¹⁰² The basis of identity, therefore, does not have to be realistic or verifiable, and the community shows more need for its „remembered past“ the more its identity is problematic¹⁰³. „Identity that exists firmly, does not have a need for the explicit and thematic recourse to memory...recourse to memory, i.e. subjective and personal, is more likely to happen when the objective bases are not adequate“.¹⁰⁴

This strife of the collective to form „a community of history and destiny“¹⁰⁵ comes across as an expression of the need for security, but also „to gain some sort of immortality, which will preserve oneself and one’s own personality and accomplishments from oblivion“¹⁰⁶. According to Smith – „by marking its beginning and existence over time, as well as its delineation within a particular space, a nation erects embankments against the flood of insignificance and absurdity“.¹⁰⁷ At the same time, these communities of memory use „collective memory to create a sense of solidarity, even when what they remember is traumatic“.¹⁰⁸

Nevertheless, these collective identities do not have a permanent duration, but are subject to cyclic re-evaluations. While they last, though, they avoid deeper probing and resist questioning. Their authority is said to „depend on our not inquiring too insistently about its factuality and not worrying overmuch about its contingency, but instead allowing ourselves to be swept away by a strong emotion dressed up in the motley of historical fact“.¹⁰⁹ It resembles a totem and attempts

¹⁰⁰ Megill, Allan, *Istorija, secanje, identitet*, in: Sladecsek, Michal, Vasiljevic, Jelena, and Petrovic Trifunovic, Tamara, *Kolektivno secanje i politike pamcenja* p. 232

¹⁰¹ Megill, *ibid.*, p. 232

¹⁰² Megill, *ibid.*, p. 233

¹⁰³ Megill, *ibid.*, p. 236

¹⁰⁴ Megill, *ibid.*, p. 237

¹⁰⁵ Smith, Anthony D., *Legende i pejzazi*, in: Sladecsek, Michal, Vasiljevic, Jelena, and Petrovic Trifunovic, Tamara, *Kolektivno secanje i politike pamcenja* p. 257

¹⁰⁶ Smith, *ibid.*, p. 257

¹⁰⁷ Smith, *ibid.*, p. 257

¹⁰⁸ Sennett, Richard, *Uznemirajuca secanja*, in: Sladecsek, Michal, Vasiljevic, Jelena, and Petrovic Trifunovic, Tamara, *Kolektivno secanje i politike pamcenja* p. 337

¹⁰⁹ Rieff, *op. cit.*, p. 35

to question it may appear as taboo. „Memory as a species of morality stands as one of more unassailable pieties of our age.“¹¹⁰

However, they do eventually change. As Alaida Asman notes – „with every change of generations...the profile of memory of a society changes noticeably“.¹¹¹ On the other hand, Todor Kuljic adds a link to conflicts as a turning point in redefinition of memory. „After the end of a conflict, every reconciliation seeks a new vision of the past“.¹¹² The process can be further complicated since it often entails adjustment of the memory of the past to that of other groups.¹¹³ In a more general sense, Rieff echoes Eric Hobsbawm and his 'invention of traditions', when he writes that „new traditions (are) being established when a rapid transformation of society weakens or destroys the social pattern for which 'old' traditions had been designed“.¹¹⁴ Furthermore, „when any real continuity with the past becomes impossible, that past had to be reimagined and reconstructed both for the present's and for the future's sake“.¹¹⁵

Regarding the types of memory, there are several related classifications, but mainly coming down to the basic differentiation between the individual and the collective memory. Jan and Alaida Asman in particular look into their functions and recognise social (communicative), cultural and political memory.¹¹⁶ While all these types of memory interact, in the context of this paper, the onus is more on the cultural and political, because of their roles in creating antagonisms in the public sphere. This particularly for the reason that „the political memory filters the memories according to its needs, so the unsuitable memories are rendered invisible or omitted, while the ones that are seen as important, functional or usable get preserved.“¹¹⁷

In addition to this, according to Jan Asman, the cultural memory serves to strengthen the identity and the bond to a group.¹¹⁸ Besides the ability to undergo reconstruction¹¹⁹, it is also

¹¹⁰ Rieff, *ibid.*, p. 59

¹¹¹ Asman, Alaida, *Duga senka proslosti* (2011), p. 27, and she notes that, depending on individual societies, these intervals tend to last for about 30 years.

¹¹² Kuljic, Todor, *Prevladavanje proslosti* (2002), p. 493

¹¹³ Kuljic, *ibid.*, p. 493

¹¹⁴ Rieff, *op. cit.*, p. 34

¹¹⁵ Rieff, *ibid.*, p. 45

¹¹⁶ Sladecsek et al., *op. cit.*, p. 11-12, Asman A., *op. cit.*, pp. 72-85

¹¹⁷ Sladecsek et al., *ibid.*, p. 14

¹¹⁸ Asman, Jan, *Kolektivno secanje i kulturni identitet*, in: Sladecsek, Michal, Vasiljevic, Jelena, and Petrovic Trifunovic, Tamara, *Kolektivno secanje i politike pamcenja* p. 61

¹¹⁹ Asman, J., *ibid.*, p. 61

characterised by being obligatory in the formative and normative sense.¹²⁰ In the context of conflicting memory politics of different groups, „there is always a threat of misuse of this kind of memory, because, as pointed out in more detail further below, it gets used for strengthening of political power through formation and dissemination of specific narratives.¹²¹

At the same time, memory and remembrance need to be differentiated for the term 'history'. In this sense, there has been a lot of theoretical consideration. Starting with some earlier work in the field of memory studies, noting that the main difference is that the „memory sacralises“ while the „history dismantles“¹²² – memory is related to a group, while history is universal and belongs to everyone. Memory is thus seen as opposed to history in some way, because of its personal aspects – as „ethical and emotional duty of memory is enemy to history“.¹²³ Maurice Halbwachs, who is seen as a pioneer of memory studies, stresses that memory preserves only what is useful to itself – „what is alive in the collective consciousness, and keeps it alive“.¹²⁴

Several authors¹²⁵ went further back and noted the differentiation that Friedrich Nietzsche made between the monumental and critical history. Monumental history is seen as celebrating „a fictitious past“¹²⁶ in order to „inspire the courageous ones to crazy bravery, and the inspired ones to fanaticism“.¹²⁷ In similar vein, collective memory is likened to ideological history, „because it attempts to obscure the difference between history and myth“.¹²⁸ It has to do with a „foundation story, which talks about glory and humiliation...and as such enables the merger of purposeful misuse of memory with the effects of the distortion coming from the appearance level of ideology“.¹²⁹

The stress seems to be on the negative aspects of this kind of memory formation, which leads to sacralisation of the (chosen) past. Hence, „memory can become fruitless because the sacralised past does not remember anything else apart from itself, because that very same past, when made

¹²⁰ Asman, J., *ibid.*, p. 65

¹²¹ Sladecsek et al., *op. cit.*, p. 14

¹²² Reference to Pierre Nora, Sladecsek et al., *ibid.*, p. 15

¹²³ Sladecsek et al., *ibid.*, p. 15

¹²⁴ Halbwachs, Maurice, *Kolektivno i istorijsko pamcenje*, in: Sladecsek, Michal, Vasiljevic, Jelena, and Petrovic Trifunovic, Tamara, *Kolektivno secanje i politike pamcenja* p. 53

¹²⁵ Sladecsek et al., *op. cit.*, p. 16

¹²⁶ Blustein, *op. cit.*, p. 133

¹²⁷ Blustein, *ibid.*, p. 133

¹²⁸ Le Gauf, *op. cit.*, p. 114

¹²⁹ Ricoeur Paul, *O pamcenju i podsecanju*, in: Sladecsek, Michal, Vasiljevic, Jelena, and Petrovic Trifunovic, Tamara, *Kolektivno secanje i politike pamcenja* p. 173

banal, makes us think nonsense.“¹³⁰ Their knowledge is in many respects superficial, and the „battles for power are fought based on the superficial knowledge... where each side opposes the other by claiming to have a better and more precise superficial knowledge“. ¹³¹ It does not dig into the depths, as its aim is „to turn history into memory, in order to explain what needs to be remembered and how it needs to be remembered“. ¹³²

Agents of this kind of approach to memory as opposed to critical history „tended to reinvent and reconstitute ethnic pasts, and did not hesitate to use the latest techniques and scientific methods for shameless romanticising endeavours.“¹³³ The forms in which the memory is rendered further can be didactic and dramatic. ¹³⁴

The plain in which memory is objectivised is culture, „where it becomes institutionalised and symbolically transferred“. ¹³⁵ Institutionalisation is the key word here, as the way the memory is institutionalised explains „the integrative functions of memory, as well as its important roles in constituting a wider social or national identity“. ¹³⁶ There are different forms in which memory is constructed. In order to be constructed, it manifests itself by way of symbolic forms, such as signs, texts, rituals, ceremonies, monuments, memorial centres and so on. ¹³⁷ These symbolic representations „reflect the classification of the past to important, less relevant and superfluous.“¹³⁸ These manifestations of memory serve to evoke the identity triggers, and, as with the sacralisation of foundation myths – „stresses certain aspects of power.“¹³⁹

Ricoeur recognised the new „frenetic need for commemorations“¹⁴⁰, which makes a clear parallel to the subject matter of this paper, especially concerning the growing focus that commemorative events in Bosnia and Herzegovina have obtained over the past several years. However, the purpose of these ritualistic events is limited to their narrow scope – „confirming a negative picture of the others in the past, or one’s own positive picture... but also draws the attention away

¹³⁰ Todorov, op. cit., p. 186

¹³¹ Hacking, Ian, *Memoropolitika*, in: Sladecsek, Michal, Vasiljevic, Jelena, and Petrovic Trifunovic, Tamara, *Kolektivno secanje i politike pamcenja* p. 201

¹³² McGill, op. cit., p. 243

¹³³ Smith, op. cit., p. 266

¹³⁴ Smith, *ibid.*, p. 262

¹³⁵ Sladecsek et al., op. cit., p. 12

¹³⁶ Sladecsek et al., *ibid.*, p. 12

¹³⁷ Sladecsek et al., *ibid.*, p. 11, also Asman, J. Op. cit., p. 66

¹³⁸ Sladecsek et al. *ibid.*, p. 11

¹³⁹ Le Gauf, op. cit., p. 113

¹⁴⁰ Ricoeur, op. cit., p. 173

from current emergencies.“¹⁴¹ As for the memory agents involved, as hinted in the preceding paragraphs, they use this *memory framework*, in which they favour one set of facts over the others „in order to secure for the protagonists to retain their roles of heroes, victims or moralisers.“¹⁴²

Misztal also offers an explanation of the forms in which memory is used to transfer power through „social institutions and cultural creation such as films, monuments, statues, souvenirs etc.... or through practices that are conducted on a regular basis, including commemorations, ceremonies, festivals, rituals and narratives.“¹⁴³ Within these contexts, „as never before, victims or witnesses of great violence become new and deciding engines of memory – legally and morally“¹⁴⁴, especially in the more recent period with the advance of the mass media and communication tools. The influence of these forms is great, and they „influence the forming of the public life and public opinion.“¹⁴⁵

That power has been thoroughly recognised, and establishes firm connection with politics.¹⁴⁶ „Political regimes, especially the totalitarian and authoritarian ones, strive to control memory and manipulate with it, incessantly using the monopolisation and filtration of history and memory.“¹⁴⁷ Political elites use them as a tool for their purposes. In that endeavour, memory is used as „a powerful reservoir to mobilise the sense of threat...as well as to mask their own political misuse of memory as constitutive elements for new national projects.“¹⁴⁸

In this regard, these manipulations with the memory and its forms of representation often serve to pursue nationalist strategies. „Ethnic nationalism has become a surrogate for religion aiming to overcome the sense of futility... and connecting individuals into permanent communities, whose generations create unbreakable links in the chain of memory and identity.“¹⁴⁹ As noted in the above texts, even the intellectuals take part in this complex performance, and the „professional historians often gave political legitimisation to nationalism and other revisionist

¹⁴¹ Todorov, op. cit., p. 196

¹⁴² Todorov, ibid., p. 197

¹⁴³ Misztal, op. cit., p. 307

¹⁴⁴ Blight, op. cit., p. 325

¹⁴⁵ Casey, Edward S., *Javno secanje u vremenu i prostoru*, in: Sladecsek, Michal, Vasiljevic, Jelena, and Petrovic Trifunovic, Tamara, *Kolektivno secanje i politike pamcenja* p. 365-368

¹⁴⁶ „The ghost at the banquet of all public commemorations is always politics“, Rieff, op. cit., p. 128

¹⁴⁷ Sladecsek et al., op. cit., p. 14

¹⁴⁸ Sladecsek et al., ibid., p. 31

¹⁴⁹ Olick and Robbins, op. cit., p. 99

battles for identity“.¹⁵⁰ For the sake of achieving greater national cohesion, „national states consciously manipulate and drain official history.¹⁵¹

Within Hobsbawm register of (re)invention of traditions, history of commemorative practices is noted as mechanisms of political power.¹⁵² In the region of former Yugoslavia in general, and among others in the case of Bosnia and Herzegovina, we have been witnessing inventions of traditions across the board during the past three decades. They are an intrinsic part of the new identity engineering. It is thus worth noting here that it fits the patterns recognised in theory earlier. Hobsbawm further notes that these invented traditions „establish or maintain social cohesion... legitimise the institutions... and instil beliefs, value systems and behavioural conventions.“¹⁵³

On the other hand, little or no heed is being paid on the adverse effects of such approaches to memory. In the battle for power in the former Yugoslav context, where the value system has experienced a major quake, one can hardly expect more cautious, more responsible and more carefully analysed approaches from the key political agents. The combined formed and imposed memory landscapes that now serve as totems, pose a taboo topic for questioning, so even thinking about potential healing effect of some forms of forgetting cannot even be mentioned.

On the contrary, what is unfortunately confirmed over and again in the regional, as well as in the general global context, is to control memory and forgetting „as one of the great preoccupations of classes, groups, individuals, who dominated and continue to master historical societies.“¹⁵⁴ Collective memory is a „high stake“ with the ruling classes in both developed and developing societies.¹⁵⁵

Still, Blustein draws from earlier mentioned Nietzsche's remarks about the weight of remembering and the benefit of unburdening that forgetting may bring.¹⁵⁶ Certainly in the current global and regional context, this does not hint toward forgetting of mass violations of human rights and the atrocities committed, but the imposed pressure of remembrance and the toxic

¹⁵⁰ Olick and Robbins, *ibid.*, p. 99

¹⁵¹ Olick and Robbins, *ibid.*, p. 100, 104

¹⁵² Olick and Robbins, *ibid.*, p. 90

¹⁵³ Hobsbawm, Eric, *Kako se tradicije izmisljaju*, in: Sladecsek, Michal, Vasiljevic, Jelena, and Petrovic Trifunovic, Tamara, *Kolektivno secanje i politike pamcenja* p. 221

¹⁵⁴ Le Gauff, *op. cit.*, p. 112

¹⁵⁵ Le Gauff, *ibid.*, p. 125

¹⁵⁶ Blustein, *op. cit.*, p. 131

environment the opposing and mutually exclusive memory politics create and reinforce, deserve at least some thought.

However, critical approaches to culture of remembrance stress the importance of the good use of remembrance, and make it serve juster causes.¹⁵⁷ The approaches that serve toward emancipation¹⁵⁸ rather than indoctrination. In this sense, Avishai Margalit stresses the importance of remorse as a way of overcoming disturbing past.¹⁵⁹ Forgiveness is the capital that the victims possess, another complex concept, entailing the need to „overcome the bitterness“ (or „the grudge“) that the violation initially created with the victims.

* * *

Along with this broader theoretical network related to memory, and the above overview of the main topics and concepts that lie in the background of the memory studies, this paper also connects on two specific recent inquiries into the field, addressing some of the key questions outlined in the introduction.

One of these two is the study of the global phenomenon of „moral remembrance“ by Lea David¹⁶⁰, where she notes the problems arising from the recent trend of prescribing the right forms of moral remembrance based on human rights. There she notes that „the ‘moral remembrance’ prescribes the standards of correct remembrance and expects everyone to abide by them... based on the normative views of human rights which promote facing the past, duty to remember and justice for victims.“¹⁶¹

This study notes the counter-effects of this approach, and the negative consequences it produces, contrary to the proclaimed goals. Therefore, David notes, this approach does not give the expected results in practice, on the contrary, „that process often brings to further destabilisation of the conflict and the post-conflict reality, contributes to the existing animosities, and strengthens the ethnically based nationalism.“¹⁶² The imperatives brought forth by the moral

¹⁵⁷ Todorov, op. cit., p. 195

¹⁵⁸ Ricoeur, op. cit., p. 172

¹⁵⁹ Margalit, Avishai, *Oprastanje i zaboravljanje*, in: Sladecek, Michal, Vasiljevic, Jelena, and Petrovic Trifunovic, Tamara, *Kolektivno secanje i politike pamcenja* p. 159

¹⁶⁰ David, Lea, *Proslost nas ne moze izleciti* (2020)

¹⁶¹ David, ibid., p. 15

¹⁶² David, ibid., p. 18

remembrance „reflect only one set of events from the past as key, while all else must not be mentioned and has to be suppressed.“¹⁶³

Therefore, as a consequence, „the central intention of the agenda of memorialisation of human rights – which is to prevent the repetition of violence by promoting human rights and democratisation in post-conflict societies – achieves a diametrically opposite outcome: strengthening of divisions.“¹⁶⁴ Though opting against the option of forgetting¹⁶⁵, she continues to note that the attempted prescribed models, for different reasons, failed to produce results.

The other study is more recent and concerns the comparison of mnemonic practices through several case studies, showing that the specific models of culture of remembrance have a harmful and divisive effect, and are not conducive to peace.¹⁶⁶ In these selected cases, Bosnia and Herzegovina and remembrance of the Sarajevo siege is one of them, „there are no ongoing hostilities, but the continuities of violence are very much present“,¹⁶⁷ concluding that therefore the relationship between memory and peace needs a more systematic investigation.¹⁶⁸ Similar to more general observations in the quoted study by Lea David, this research also shows that the proclaimed goals of remembrance often have opposite effect, and „hinder transformation as they keep performing the past and projecting its assumed significance onto the present.“¹⁶⁹

This research brings in some interesting parallels, that sound very familiar to those who are following the developments in former Yugoslavia, in particular Bosnia and Herzegovina. There are some irresistible associations when they look into the mnemonic practices in Cyprus and Rwanda, some of whose aspects coincide with the phenomena observed in Bosnia and Herzegovina (in general, as will be shown later, not only in the case of the Sarajevo siege which is comprehensively analysed in this book).

As a conclusion regarding potential ways forward toward a more peaceful impact of culture of remembrance, Mannergren et al. stress three conditions that need to be met. First of them is plurality, as „a just peace presupposes the existence of several threads that can be woven together

¹⁶³ David, *ibid.*, p. 82

¹⁶⁴ David, *ibid.*, p. 84

¹⁶⁵ David, *ibid.*, p. 216

¹⁶⁶ Mannergren et al., *op. cit.*, p. 2

¹⁶⁷ Mannergren et al., *ibid.*, p. 2

¹⁶⁸ Mannergren et al., *ibid.*, p. 5

¹⁶⁹ Mannergren et al., *ibid.*, p. 31

– plurality of interpretations of the past“.¹⁷⁰ The second is dignity, calling for the acknowledgment of the suffering for the victims¹⁷¹, and the third being inclusivity, which will help going „beyond polarising narratives“.¹⁷²

Both David and Mannergren et al. have recognised the core of the problem that the current situation involving memory politics in Bosnia and Herzegovina, offering some ideas about potential remedies, but both, especially the former recognise that some magic solution is not anywhere near in the current circumstances. Similar to the approach of critical culture of remembrance, all these ideas imply the existence of a more sophisticated, more emancipated societies, and the memory agents, political and other actors, who would be less prone to manipulation and more dedicated to the goal of overcoming the past grievances, rather than maintaining them, and building the new ones based on, to give them the benefit of the doubt, to say the least – suspicious personal motivation.

¹⁷⁰ Mannergren et al., *ibid.*, p. 203

¹⁷¹ Mannergren et al., *ibid.*, p. 204

¹⁷² Mannergren et al., *ibid.*, p. 206

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Theory and research dedicate a lot of attention to different aspects of reconciliation, aimed at analysing different ways for overcoming trauma and the process of healing. Bosnia and Herzegovina has been particularly interesting and produced extensive research in the field of transitional justice, including the effect of public apologies, attempts of truth commissions, as well as forgiveness and contacts on the individual level. Recently there have been more note of the adversarial effect of the reconciliation attempts in the context of transitional justice, in the sense of their becoming „instruments to continue the conflict“¹⁷³. Most specifically, this research links to the assumption that failure of transitional justice effort in this regard may be linked to the results of the „imposition of global norm of transitional justice and associated human rights language, which alienates local victim communities“¹⁷⁴.

Acknowledging different definitions of reconciliation, this research looks into two different levels. One is the level of *political reconciliation*, which concerns the behaviour of the higher levels of authorities in the ethnic communities in Bosnia and Herzegovina, while the other is the level of *social reconciliation*, which concerns the relations on the individual level in the communities.

This paper follows these two levels in line with the basic outlines provided by Bloomfield, and elaborated on in the previous section, as well as the analysis of their interaction as presented by Strupskiene. Therefore, the key perspective that is offered here is exactly the influence that the actions from the political level has on both political and individual level reconciliation, or, to be more precise, for creating and maintaining the conditions that act contrary to the improvement of the inter-ethnic and social relations, as well as the level of anxiety among the individual people.

While the current situation shows an acute problem on the political, public level, it is important to check its effect on the individual level. A degree of deterioration is certain, and however difficult it may be to differentiate subjective from objective, one of the aims of the analyses is to establish the particular effect that the memorialisation practices have on the community level.

Acknowledging the views which hold that reconciliation requires facing the facts and delivery of justice, as in quoted Vjekoslav Perica's work, this paper recognises that despite a lot of efforts

¹⁷³ Hughes, Kostovicova, op.cit. p. 7

¹⁷⁴ Kostovicova, op. Cit. pp. 4-5

invested into the process of transitional justice, the situation on the ground shows tendencies to resist such outcome, where memory politics is found to provide good part of material in that regard. Hence, leaning also on the above outlined findings of Lea David in relation to the human rights agenda and the memory politics, this paper uses the transitional justice framework to point to the issues that work against its proclaimed goals. The argument here is more in line with the above presented point by Leonard, that the scope of looking into the truth should include all perspectives.

In this vein, this research draws partly on the notion of *reconciliation by stealth* (Kostovicova), and seeks to check to what extent the natural or instigated process of overcoming the ethnic divide on the individual level gets affected by the repeated challenges posed by the manifestations of memory politics and their growing importance and political abuse. Political reconciliation here strikes as a tougher goal to achieve, and puts itself in front as a priority and a prerequisite for a sustainable peace process.

However, the key focus of this research relates to the matter of memory politics and impact of memorialisation practices on the process of reconciliation, and consequently on the peace process in Bosnia and Herzegovina. It has been widely recognised in the public sphere, and increasingly also in the reports by relevant NGOs and analytical teams, as well as in the media, that the commemorative events have been recognised by the political leaders as a tool for political promotion, and furthering of the political goals, as well as adopted general policies. In this sense, the culture of remembrance is perceived as abused for different political purposes, and the accompanying strong rhetoric set the stage for the continuation of the conflict.

As often noted, war memorials become the new battleground, confirming the conclusions that collective memory carries a link to nationalism. Dayton Peace Agreement has been analysed from this aspect as well, especially regarding the situation that it enabled the survival of three competitive historical narratives related to the 1992-95 war, making it possible for the political elites and consequently the communities themselves to live in narrative discourse whose contents do not overlap, and most frequently clash. Memory work then becomes a prominent tool that is actually working against the conflict transformation, and new conflicts regarding the recognition of the past injustices.

This research leans towards the understanding of the critical culture of remembrance, in order to attempt at establishing the realistic possibilities to work toward a mutually acceptable memorialisation practices in general. In particular, the research follows the recent argumentation that the prescribed standardised moral remembrance, formulated through three principles – facing the past, justice for the victims, and duty to remember – promoted through the process of implementing the human rights approaches and policies have not given the expected results. To the contrary, this approach has been one of the contributing factors to the deterioration of the peace process.

In particular, the understanding of the critical culture of remembrance is drawn from the above quoted Kuljic, though, among other things, this paper concludes that due to different factors this approach may not be realistic to achieve. The authors like David Rieff partly inspired the analysis, and, following his wise advice, not to preach forgetting, but to allow for a more comprehensive approach. Finally, as the previous paragraph hinted, the key inspiration came from the work of Lea David, and her rethinking of the problem of memorialisation due to its negative effect on social reconciliation.

While this whole set of problems can be assessed from different angles, and the growing body of research and theory about memory politics and culture of remembrance do tackle some of these aspects. However, there is a need to look directly into the impact that the memory politics in general, in all its aspects, affect the reconciliation process, both on the political and on the social, community level, and ultimately how that affects the overall peacebuilding, or conflict transformation in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The intention of this research is to look specifically into this problem and suggest potential alternative approaches towards salvaging of the peace process.

3. RESEARCH METHODS

This research spanned over three years, and was conducted from April 2023 to July 2025. However, the events and situations referred to took place over a longer period of time, mainly after the year 2000, after a more significant minority return within Bosnia and Herzegovina, and a start of consolidation of this multi-ethnic society in the new circumstances.

It mostly used a qualitative approach, employing two key methods. One is the content analysis of media reports, press releases and interviews, documents and reports produced by the international organisations, NGOs and local institutions. The identification of the contents was also drawn from the personal experience of the author, who has been working for the Office of the High Representative since 2000 to date, following, among other things, the problems related to inter-ethnic relations in ethnically mixed areas in the eastern parts of the Republika Srpska.

Media sources included three daily newspapers („Glas Srpske“, „Oslobodjenje“ and „Dnevni avaz“), and a larger number of online sources, web pages and portals, which report on the developments in Bosnia and Herzegovina, as well as specific localities. Both dailies and online sources were selected based on their relevance and coverage. Besides the online web-pages of the said newspapers, the latter also include portals of the daily „Faktor“ (faktor.ba), weekly „Stav“ (stav.ba), „Radio Televizija Republike Srpske“ (rtrs.tv), „RTV Bijeljina“ (rtvbn.com), „Alternativna Televizija“ (atv.com), „Srpska Info“ (srpskainfo.com), BIRN (detektor.ba), portal Klix (klix.ba).

Local online outlets included portals like „Direkt“ (direkt-portal.com/), „Istok“ (istokrs.com), „Info Bijeljina“ (infobijeljina.com), „Zvornicki“ (zvornicki.ba), „Radio Osvit“ (radioosvit.com), „Radio Foca“ (radiofoca.com), „Filter“ (citajfilter.com), as well as Facebook pages „Despotovina“ and „Manastir Karno“.

The other method were interviews with the local residents in Bosnia and Herzegovina, in order to get information of their perception of the process of reconciliation and the impact of memorialisation themes on that process.

During the work on this thesis, over the span of three years, I interviewed 54 participants (who mostly expressed their wish for anonymity). Several of them I spoke to on two, some on three occasions over the period (a total of 63 conversations), in the light of some new developments, especially during the public debate regarding the adoption of the UN Srebrenica Resolution in April and May 2024. The interview questions were designed to leave the interlocutors space to voice their views with as little suggestion as possible (“how would you assess the state of reconciliation?”, “what do you think are the main reasons for the current state?”, “could you single out one most important factor and why?”).

The profiles included mostly ordinary population of all ethnicities, though predominantly Serb and Bosniak, both as majority people in their communities or as minority returnees. The interlocutors were between 26 and 72 years of age, while the predominant age group included individuals between 40 and 60.

Most of them are from Podrinje area (Srebrenica, Bratunac and Zvornik, as well as Bijeljina), with additional interlocutors from Brcko, Sarajevo, Banja Luka, Mostar and Trebinje. They come from different backgrounds, mostly ordinary second school level education employees or farmers, pensioners, and a number of people with higher level education, like teachers or administration employees. Apart from them, I consulted several local employees in different international organisations and civil society representatives.

As the following chapter will show, the research has identified a number of recurring topics and several locations which feature most frequently in the antagonisms and creation of animosity. That is why the individual case studies primarily feature places like Srebrenica and Bratunac, Sarajevo, Mostar and Prijedor.

Collected information significantly exceeds the defined scope of this kind of paper, and there has to be a stricter selection. There is still a lot of material that had to be left aside, though interesting for further research in this context, or for research in other directions and from different perspectives.

4. MEMORY POLITICS AS OBSTACLE TO RECONCILIATION IN BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA – CASE STUDY

4.1 General Overview

Post 1990's war culture of remembrance basically manifests all the characteristics, noted in the above literature review. It can be easily said that it confirms theoretical assumptions, however, considering the negative impact it shows in every day life of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the implications are more sinister. As a daily divisive topic in the public sphere, and hardly any day passes without media references to the points of contention in relation to war memory, culture of remembrance as manifestation of opposing memory politics regularly adds more and more elements into the puzzle of the Bosnian antagonisms. Even more so during the periods of larger and more prominent commemorative events, when it heats the public temperature almost to the boiling point, which will be supported by several examples further in the text.

Starting with the question of identity building, or perhaps better be said *identity engineering*, as the whole process strikes as pushed forward overly by artificial and imaginative twists and interpretations of facts. This process has been taking place within the social context created by a successful peace agreement, which brought the end of armed hostilities, but eventually did not tackle the roots of the conflict. Preoccupied with the stabilisation of the physical peace, and subsequent process of state-building, the agents within Bosnia and Herzegovina, primarily but not exclusively – the international factor, failed to address this core question related to entrenching the peace itself. As a result, the local political structures slowly and successfully learned how to use these new circumstances for their benefit, and over time completely mastered the field of memory.¹⁷⁵

In the lack of credible and persistent alternative, the opposing views persisted, gaining deeper roots and gradually widening the psychological gap between the communities. The main

¹⁷⁵ Interviews #11, #32, #34, with employees of international organisations, and interview #4 with a local NGO employee note this as well.

component part of the creation, maintaining and strengthening of the (new) identities remained opposed diametrically, reflecting the sources of the original conflict. After the crash of the dominant socialist Yugoslav identities, the (re)created ethnic identities were reinforced through the war, fuelled by fears and antagonisms with the others, and have continued along the same course in the post-war period.

Therefore, the culture of conflict also persisted, as the unresolved, and to put it completely bluntly – unaddressed differences and the absence of a meaningful dialogue toward positive peace, and it found itself a comfortable nest in the sphere of the culture of remembrance. In the place of true dialogue, each community felt that it underwent some form of imposition, that made them feel uncomfortable within the new circumstances, drawing from the earlier noted dissatisfaction and lack of honesty regarding the acceptance of the result of the Dayton Peace Agreement.¹⁷⁶

War memory naturally came as the best field where these antagonisms could be nourished and used to build estranged identities, with hardly any touch between each other. These circumstances lead into the situation where Bosnia and Herzegovina's communities developed competing victimhood, built through narratives of one's own perceived heroism and suffering, and the other's evil intent and crime. Political agents, at the same time, recognised the field of war memory as a powerful tool to make appeal on their respective communities, and use it to gain and preserve power. War memory related discourse has become a source of constant friction, and the events and situations related to the war memory thus often resemble the place of political campaign, masked in the wrapping of concern for their respective community's security.

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Each community now is only and exclusively proud of their honourable defence during the war, indebted the war heroes and the war victims, which should not be a problem unless that it is a sole content of the reduced, even depleted identity profiles that emerged as a consequence of war and post-war developments.

¹⁷⁶ Bose, Sumantra, *Bosnia after Dayton* (2002), p. 29.

¹⁷⁷ „Bosnian War Memorials Become Political Battleground“, Balkan Insight on 8.8.2016: <https://balkaninsight.com/2016/08/08/bosnian-war-memorials-become-political-battleground-08-08-2016/>

To a smaller or larger extent, besides true heroisms, this discourse also uses glorification of people who were sentenced by different courts as war criminals, and the discourse of exaggeration of one's own victimhood, and denial or minimisation of the victimhood of the other.¹⁷⁸ Turning back to the prospects for the peacebuilding and the lack of meaningful and persistent attempts toward the building of a culture of peace, this puts Bosnian-Herzegovinian society into a very toxic frame. As peace and confidence take a long time to build, the question is – whether it may now be too late to start again?

Opposing views now dominate the public discourse, and now every single, even small controversy, has a potential to be spun and cause an antagonistic public debate. Different views on prosecution of war crimes, or lack of prosecution of war crimes, different view on memory and selective memory, different views on symbols and important dates, and the list goes on, do beg the question of the country's future and the potential of the three Bosnian-Herzegovinian communities to heal and eventually come closer. Everything is in threes – basically there are three truths about everything.

This research has identified several topics that recur, and several locational hot spots, connected to which there are most frequent antagonisms that poison the public sphere, which sometimes even result in fear and anxiety among the population, and push the communities farther away from each other, and from reconciliation, and their country away from true peace. These include most prominently Srebrenica, and in connection with Srebrenica – it is Bratunac. Several other communities in the area of Podrinje also feature occasionally as places of memory conflicts, while for the other parts of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the most interesting situation in this regard is in Sarajevo and Mostar, Stolac, Prijedor, with occasional news from several, more random locations.

Regarding the ethnic groups involved, the analysis shows two main axes of conflict, of which the Serb-Bosniak axis appears more dominant. This does not suggest, though, that the other, Bosniak-Croat axis is more positive. On the contrary, it also shows very strong negative potential and creates animosity, but they appear to be of somewhat smaller overall impact country wide. The third axis involving Croat and Serbs does not strike as prominent within the context of

¹⁷⁸ "Govor mržnje i glorifikacija ratnih zločinaca doprinijeli polarizaciji društva" (*Hate speech and glorification of war criminals contributed to polarisation of society*), Detektor on 21.6.2023: <https://detektor.ba/2023/06/21/govor-mrznje-i-glorifikacija-ratnih-zlocinaca-doprini-jeli-polarizaciji-drustva/>

Bosnia and Herzegovina, which may partly be due to the stronger alliance of the respective political elites. However, it does exist but between the Serb component and the Croat component in Croatia, triggered by the war memory resulting from the war there.

The fourth ingredient in this mixture is the international community in Bosnia and Herzegovina, due to their displayed or perceived alliances with the ethnic communities in Bosnia and Herzegovina. As some of the below examples show, the international component also serves the divisive narratives, despite the attempts to claim impartiality. The persisting differences between the international representations themselves, reflecting the geo-political divide, are a complicating element in itself.

Finally, the interviews with the local population, local political representatives, and a few of long serving international officers engaged in Bosnia and Herzegovina also confirm the growing divisions, even animosity between the communities as a result of the public spats and campaign in relation to war memory and commemorative events.¹⁷⁹ Still, the ordinary population shows certain level of resilience, which gives hope that the reconciliation process has not been knocked down completely, but at the same time they mostly display anxiety and pessimism for the future.¹⁸⁰

Although the original intention here was to present the findings based on the particular topics that appear in different locational contexts, the names of locations seem to trigger more specific response. Therefore, the topics are presented by locations, providing notable examples of the conflict triggers and subsequent reactions, followed by a section which contains other relevant events which are spread wider spatially. The presentation will conclude with a summary of the views of the surveyed interlocutors.

4.2 Srebrenica/Bratunac – The Battles Continue

The area of Podrinje, particularly the area of Srebrenica stands among the sites, which carry the heaviest burden due to the amount of human and other destruction during the war. In this sense,

¹⁷⁹ This was one of the statements repeated most frequently in the interviews.

¹⁸⁰ In the words of one of the interlocutors – „ja sa mojim komsijama i dalje normalno, ali osjeti se razlika u odnosu na prije koju godinu“ (*I still have normal interaction with my neighbours, but I can feel the difference compared to a few years ago*), interview #14 (Srebrenica)

it holds a prominent place together with the places like Sarajevo, Mostar, Brcko, Prijedor, as well as several other places in Podrinje area – with no intention to underestimate any others, as the war hardly spared any particular region. It thus comes as no surprise that the list of the most problematic areas in the post war memory setting largely corresponds to the list of the places that suffered most destruction.

The war in Podrinje was brutal, and along with the confirmed atrocities that took place in the communities such as Bijeljina, Zvornik, Bratunac, Vlasenica, Visegrad or Foca, Srebrenica has been recognised as the one symbol of the brutality of war, due to the events that took place there in July 1995. ICTY, and subsequently other court instances confirmed this as the biggest war crime that took place in Europe after World War 2, and qualified it as genocide against the Bosniaks from the UN Safe Area.¹⁸¹

Several years after the Dayton Peace Agreement, the area of Bratunac and Srebrenica experienced a start of the return movement of Bosniak population, whose peak was between 2000 and 2003.¹⁸² As a result, the population of this previously ethnically cleansed area became mixed again, requiring time and effort for the two ethnic communities to get used to living next to each other. This was particularly the case in Srebrenica itself, which has received enormous international support in order to enable the return and functioning of the community consisting of two ethnic groups burdened by horrible war legacy.

The process of return and reconstruction did not go without (initially open and active) opposition, and it brought with it the new challenges regarding the support to the renewed coexistence, and but aside from the support to reconstruction and to a certain extent to support for economic sustainability to the (mainly Bosniak) returnee families, there did not seem to be a concerted effort or any systematic and strategic approach to the issue of reconciliation.¹⁸³ Therefore, the improvement of mutual tolerance happened mostly spontaneously, or „by stealth“ to use the term Kostovicova used when analysing the effects of RECOM sessions.¹⁸⁴

¹⁸¹ „Genocid u Srebrenici su potvrdili i međunarodni i domaći sudovi“ (*Genocide in Srebrenica confirmed by both international and domestic courts*), Federalna TV on 23.5.2024: <https://federalna.ba/genocid-u-srebrenici-su-potvrdili-i-medunarodni-i-domaci-sudovi-5spl2>

¹⁸² Rondic, Adnan, *Povratak izmedju privida i stvarnosti* (2007), p. 10 registers halt in return by 2006. This time frame is confirmed in conversation with a former international employee in Zvornik (interview #21).

¹⁸³ Interviews #11 and #34 with employees of international organisations.

¹⁸⁴ Kostovicova, op. cit.

However, this process also resulted in the strengthening of the old grievances, as well as the accumulation of the new ones. The earlier divisions that were not systematically addressed, were strengthened further by the sense of discrimination that both communities felt for different reasons – the Bosniaks for not getting their equal status in the communities, while the Serbs felt left outside the reconstruction process, which largely targeted Bosniak communities.¹⁸⁵

With the return movement, the issue of commemorating the war atrocities started getting more importance. Whereas they were previously organised in exile, the progress of the transitional justice processes, and search for the missing persons brought the question of setting up memorial cemeteries and memorialisation in general.¹⁸⁶ As the sole largest war crime during the war, Srebrenica rightly got the most attention in this sense, and the most support, resulting in the establishment of the Memorial Centre in Potocari.¹⁸⁷

The commemorations and mass burials of identified victims started there in 2003, from the beginning getting the most attention in public, compared to other commemorative events in the area. The attendance to these commemorative events has been comparably high since the beginning, and was especially high during the 'round anniversaries', i.e. in 2005 and 2015 for the tenth, and the twentieth anniversaries.¹⁸⁸ Still, apart from this event itself, other commemorative events did not get such prominence, nor were getting much echo in the media.

Over time, this practice has changed. With the establishment of the Bosniak memorial in Bratunac (called „Veljaci“) in 2007, it looks like the tide started to turn. Serb commemorations, that were previously generally not so large, started gaining prominence. While in the earlier 2000s, Serb commemoration got higher level attendance only occasionally, over time these events became recognised as an important factor in maintaining and strengthening of the Serb narrative of the war, and besides commemorating the victims from their side, they have also been recognised as convenient places for political promotion.¹⁸⁹

¹⁸⁵ All Bosniaks interviewed mentioned in some form the feeling of discrimination (interviews #6, #7, #9 in Bratunac, #18 and #19 in Srebrenica, while some Serb interlocutors spoke about the grievances regarding the perceived prioritisation of Bosniaks regarding post-war assistance (interview #15 with a local politician, and #3, #4 and #24 with Serb residents in Bratunac and Zvornik).

¹⁸⁶ Interview 11 (employee of an international organisation).

¹⁸⁷ Established by way of Decision of the High Representative in 2000. Memorial Centre Srebrenica webpage: <https://srebrenicamemorial.org/bs/stranica/o-nama/3?tab=historija-memorijalnog-centra>.

¹⁸⁸ Interview # 23, member of a local administration.

¹⁸⁹ Noted by interlocutors from international organisations, interviews #11, #21 and #32

Parallel to this, the two ethnic communities developed their memorialisation practices, resulting in two opposing and apparently irreconcilable war narratives. The Bosniak community centred their memory on two pillars – the genocide from July 1995, as confirmed by different court instances in a number of cases, and the beginning of the war, when Bosniak communities across the Podrinje area suffered major atrocities as a result of what is termed the aggression on Bosnia and Herzegovina. On the other hand, the Serb narrative developed partly in the opposition to the dominant Bosniak views, and centred itself around the denial of the genocide on one hand, and the neglected and unacknowledged suffering of the Serb population on the other.

Indeed, this dividing axis revolving around the issue of the qualification „genocide“ and denial or refusal to accept that qualification, has over time gained the most prominent position in the general inter-ethnic Serb-Bosniak divide. This question far exceeds the level of the local community itself, and is part of a larger conflict of memory, a major component of the ongoing political wars. The issue has evolved, and the genocide has become a prominent word, where both ethnic sides tend to base their respective memory on the story of the experienced genocide(s).¹⁹⁰

The Bosniak side thus, tends to include all Bosnian war and the suffering of Bosniaks in a protracted genocide, where Srebrenica 1995 was only a culmination. Only recently one could hear that Prijedor crimes from 1992 are seen as genocide¹⁹¹. One earlier dispute in Visegrad led to the major public mobilisation, which occasionally resounds today – where the local Bosniaks put a monument at the local cemetery, dedicated to the „victims of the genocide in Visegrad“, only to have the word „genocide“ scraped off by the local construction inspection.¹⁹² Bratunac Bosniaks often announce their May commemoration by putting the words „genocide against Bosniaks of Bratunac“ on the posters. As a response, the Serb memory narrative leans largely on the suffering of the Serb population during World War 2, but as of recently more and more

¹⁹⁰ Paul Mojzes provides an account of all such instances in the 20th century history of the Balkans in *Balkan Genocides* (2011).

¹⁹¹ „Izetbegović u MC Kamičani: Genocid nije počinjen samo u Srebrenici, počeo je masovnim etničkim čišćenjem 1992. širom BiH“, (*Izetbegovic at MC Kamicani: Genocide was not committed only in Srebrenica, it started with the ethnic cleansing in 1992 across BiH*), published on faktor.ba on 20.7.2025.: <https://faktor.ba/bosna-i-hercegovina/aktuelno/izetbegovic-u-mc-kamicani-genocid-nije-pocinjen-samo-u-srebrenici-poceo-je-masovnim-etnickim-ciscenjem-1992-sirom-bih/225444>

¹⁹² „Uklonjena riječ genocid sa mezarja Stražište“, (*Word genocide removed from cemetery Straziste*), published on Balkans.aljazeera.net on 23.1. 2014: <https://balkans.aljazeera.net/news/balkan/2014/1/23/uklonjena-rijec-genocid-sa-mezarja-straziste>

tending to respond by calling the Serb suffering in Podrinje during the last war as genocide against the Serbs, mostly recently echoed at the Serb commemorations in Bratunac and Zalazje.¹⁹³

Both of these narratives were to a growing extent appropriated by the respective political elites, and have over time growingly become the component part of the higher-level politics. They became part of the usual political arsenal, touching on the core inter-ethnic antagonisms and deepening them even further. Serb mainstream politics thus sees the memorialisation from the Bosniak side as a weapon by which they attack and undermine the Republika Srpska, whereas the Bosniak mainstream politics experience the memorialisation from the Serb side as continuation of genocide denial by which they attack and undermine Bosnia and Herzegovina.

In this growingly toxic environment, the area of Bratunac and Srebrenica, become the subject of public debate and a political, sometimes even security hot spots, every year, which experience culmination during the period of preparations for the commemorations, and around holding of the commemorations themselves.

And while earlier on, the tensions would arise during the said periods, roughly from April to mid-July every year, after which the communities had time to reset and come back to their everyday activities in an environment of reduced pressure, during the past several years there has been a noticeable increase of the media presence of these topics even outside this period.¹⁹⁴ And while the period of commemorations is still the time when these tensions reach their peak, now the public spat around these topics continue throughout the year.

The calendar of commemorations includes several most prominent events, and numerous smaller scale commemorations in different micro locations. The main commemorative period starts with the commemoration for Bosniak victims from Bratunac in 1992, which is taking place every year on 12 May. The main focus is on the first half of July, starting with the central Serb commemoration to the victims of the Podrinje area, taking place on the first Saturday in July at the town cemetery in Bratunac, This is followed by several prominent events related to the commemoration of the Srebrenica genocide, starting with the „March of Peace“, which is

¹⁹³ “Nad Srbima u Podrinju pocinjen genocid i o tome se ne smije cutati” (*Serbs in Podrinje suffered genocide, and that must not be kept quiet about*), RTRS, 12.7.2025: <https://lat.rtrs.tv/vijesti/vijest.php?id=606867>.

¹⁹⁴ Interview #11.

organised in memory of the victims and survivors who tried to escape Srebrenica after it was captured by the Serb forces on 11 July 1995. Srebrenica Municipal Assembly holds a commemorative session dedicated to all victims from the municipality every 10 July, a practice established in 2005 as an attempt toward mutual recognition of suffering and to show respect for each other's victims.¹⁹⁵

On the 11 July, Memorial Centre Potocari hosts a commemoration and burial of victims of the Srebrenica genocide, identified during the period since the previous commemoration. Serbs of Srebrenica hold their commemorative event on 12 July at the village Zalazje, commemorating the attack and destruction of several Serb villages by the Army of BiH forces from Srebrenica on that date in 1992. Finally, the period finishes with the organised visit of the associations of „Mothers of Srebrenica“ to the sites of mass atrocities and mass graves from July 1995, during which they now visit 12 such locations in the wider area of Srebrenica, Bratunac and Zvornik.

This period is also characterised by an increased media interest and reporting, which brings this area into the headlines, especially in the beginning and mid-July, abounding with the memories of war, and the related political exchange of fire over the established sources of disagreement. This helps build a negative atmosphere both on the ground and in the wider public of the respective ethnic communities. The atmosphere has become particularly charged in the past several years, most specifically in 2024, during the public campaign for and against the adoption of the UN Srebrenica Resolution.

Depending on the year, during this period the area of Bratunac and Srebrenica becomes the scene of more or less provocations or incidents, that polarise the ethnic communities and the wider public. Fuelled by the power from the opposing narratives, different actors get motivated to make their ethnic case or show defiance, convinced of their contribution to their respective ethnic cause. Similarly, the commemorative events themselves serve as a stage for political actors who do not shy away from sending political messages, again along the well-defined lines of division, which silence other, conciliatory messages that can be heard.

The patterns tend to repeat every year, with the same events, followed by the same kind of political rhetoric, appearance and pursuing of the divisive statements, use of the provocative

¹⁹⁵ Interviews #11 and #32

language or insignia, and so on. On the example of 2025 only, one can get an overview of key issues that revolve around this period every year.

Starting with the Bosniak commemoration in Bratunac in May, it has to be noted that apart from bigger prominence it receives in the media and political statements, it has not been connected to any particular incident or provocation for the past several years. However, besides noting an incident in 2012¹⁹⁶, it was more part of the general public spat regarding war memory. The establishment of the Veljaci Memorial in Bratunac in 2007 was preceded by a months long bitter public argument between the representatives of the two communities regarding the location of the Memorial, which brought to the surface a lot of bitterness from both sides. In the following years, and more and more so for the past several years, it serves to announce the period of heightened inter-ethnic disputes related to the opposed war memory.

The main string of events in July starts with the central commemoration to Serb victims from the area of Podrinje at the town cemetery in Bratunac, on the first Saturday in July. This commemoration has been taking place in Bratunac since 2010, when it was separated from the commemoration of 12 July, taking place in Zalazje near Srebrenica. 12 July Zalazje commemoration continued as the date for commemoration only for Srebrenica Serbs, but before that it was held as a central commemorative event for Serb victims from the wider area.

The fact that it was taking place on 12 July, one day after the Bosniak commemoration in Potocari was a source of a lot of friction around these dates in early 2000's, accompanied by the claim from the Bosniak side that the real intention of the commemoration was to mark the Serb take-over of Srebrenica.¹⁹⁷ This claim has been refuted from the Serb side, referring to the fact that 12 July is the anniversary of the attack and destruction of several Serb villages in Srebrenica and Bratunac municipalities by the Army of BiH forces from Srebrenica. Still, this detail remains deeply set inside the local minds as a cause of disagreement, although it has now become customary and hardly gets much attention.

¹⁹⁶ "Vandali pocupali 13 nisana s mezarja Veljaci u Bratuncu" (*Vandals pulled out 13 gravemarks at the cemetery Veljaci in Bratunac*), published on klix.ba, on 12.5.2012. :<https://www.klix.ba/vijesti/bih/vandali-pocupali-13-nisana-s-mezarja-veljaci-u-bratuncu/120512036>

¹⁹⁷ "Odjeci ultranacionalističkih narativa u Srebrenici 25 godina nakon genocida" (*Echoes of ultranationalist narratives in Srebrenica 25 years after the genocide*), BIRN, 8.7.2020.: <https://detektor.ba/2020/07/08/odjeci-ultranacionalistickih-narativa-u-srebrenici-25-godina-nakon-genocida/>

Even though the central Serb commemoration is now temporarily more disconnected from the one in Potocari, it is still perceived as a counter-commemoration by some, and felt as more related to the Bosniak commemoration than to the commemoration of the Serb victims themselves. Though this can partly be viewed as an exaggeration, still some other details of this commemoration do strike like being copied from the Potocari commemoration example (flower laying ceremony is the same as in Potocari, and since 2022 the organisers designed a pin, which resembles the „Srebrenica flower“ pin).

Now in Bratunac, on the first Saturday in July, this commemoration has received growing support and attempt of popularization by the Serb political representatives, including the Serb Orthodox Church. Its holding is now advertised in the media, including in Serbia, which was not the case before. The attendance in the past several years has also significantly grown, giving the event an increased media profile and importance within the Serb ethnic caucus. However, it has also become a stage from which the high level Serb political representatives send strong, often inflammatory political messages, within the context of growing political animosity, and entrenching the opposing war memory narrative, including denial of the Srebrenica genocide.¹⁹⁸ In the past years, the statements made at this commemoration, mostly by the RS President Milorad Dodik, served to heat the public debate and reactions that lead to the increase of tensions. The same practice takes place every year, and along the regular denial of genocide in Srebrenica, part of his statement from 2017 gives a good example of the potential for political turbulence (“We know of the projects of different foundations, primarily the Islamic ones, who requested and directed their money to return the Muslims here to the Drina river after the homeland war, so that they can reoccupy the Drina again.”¹⁹⁹

One very interesting detail since 2022 is the new practice of the Serb representatives, driven by the association of the families of Serb victims, of playing the photographs of the Serb victims from Podrinje alongside the road that leads from Bratunac to Memorial Centre Potocari. The aim of the action is, as the association representative notes, to show to everyone who is coming to

¹⁹⁸ “Dodik u Bratuncu: U Srebrenici se nije desio genocid, već strašan zločin” (*Dodik in Bratunac: What happened in Srebrenica was not genocide, but a horrendous crime*), published on danas.rs on 05.7.2025. <https://www.danas.rs/svet/region/dodik-u-bratuncu-u-srebrenici-se-nije-desio-genocid-vec-strasan-zlocin/>

¹⁹⁹ “Izetbegović od PIC-a i Inzka traži sankcije za anticivilizacijsko ponašanje Dodika” (*Izetbegovic demands from PIC and Inzko to sanction Dodik's anticivilisational behaviour*), Republika Info on 17.7.2017.: [Izetbegović od PIC-a i Inzka traži sankcije za anticivilizacijsko ponašanje Dodika - Republika](#)

Potocari commemoration that there are Serb victims as well, whom they do not acknowledge. It was repeated again this year, but unlike previous three occasions, it is now considered commonplace and does not attract too much attention. However, it does trigger reactions, along the line of division of the war memory and have a very strong psychological impact.²⁰⁰

From 8 July to 10 July, then comes the „March of Peace“, organised as part of the Srebrenica genocide commemoration, and takes place in the honour of the victims and the survivors of the attempt of Bosniaks from Srebrenica enclave to reach the Bosniak controlled territory after the Serb military take-over of Srebrenica in July 1995. This event involves several thousand participants every year, and goes along the path through the hills and occasionally villages in the background of Zvornik, Bratunac and Srebrenica municipalities.

Some of the participants of the March every year carry the flags with the fleur-de-lis, which is the insignia connected to the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina, and which are perceived as the symbol of the war enemy to the local Serbs. There are two variations of this flag, one which was used as official flag of the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina, and the other, with added crossed swords, was used by the Army of Bosnia and Herzegovina. The latter is called by the RS population – „the war flag“, although in practice they do not necessarily differentiate between the two versions, and tend to refer to any flag with the *fleur-de-lis* as a war flag. Appearance of these flags are customary during the March, and always cause reactions by the local Serb population and their political and social representatives, which perceive it as a deliberate provocation.²⁰¹

The commemoration of the Srebrenica genocide on 11 July at the Memorial Centre is by far the biggest event in importance, which is reflected in the attendance, both numbers and the level of representation and delegations that participate. Apart from being the commemoration of an event that was contentiously qualified as genocide, and which causes automatic reactions from the Serb side, there are no other content related strictly to the suffering of the Bosniaks that attract

²⁰⁰ „Fotografije srpskih žrtava da podsjetu na stravične zločine nad više od 600 ubijenih civila i boraca iz srednjeg Podrinja“ (*Photographs of Serb victims to remind of horrible crimes against over 600 killed civilians and soldiers from Middle Podrinje*), published on rtrs.tv on 1.7.2025:
<https://lat.rtrs.tv/vijesti/vijest.php?id=605722>

²⁰¹ „PROVOKACIJE U SREBRENICI: Ratne zastave tzv. Armije BiH u „Maršu mira““ (*Provocations in Srebrenica: War flags of the so-called Army of BiH in the “March of Peace”*), published on vecernjenovosti.ba on 10.7.2025:
<https://vecernjenovosti.ba/355408/vijesti/provokacije-u-srebrenici-ratne-zastave-tzv-armije-bih-u-marsu-mira/>

negative attention. However, this event also serves as a stage for speeches, which are often politically charged and cause reactions from the Serb side, which was again the case this year.²⁰²

Similar pattern repeats with the smaller commemoration to Srebrenica Serbs in Zalazje. While it still attracts some higher level representation from the Serb side (this year it was former high official from Serbia Aleksandar Vulin as emissary of the Serbian President Aleksandar Vucic), due to the fact that 12 July still holds to the local Serb memory as the day of commemoration, it is a fairly small event, gathering mostly the local representatives and families of the killed. Nevertheless, it is also a stage for sending strong messages, and this year this role was taken by the local parson from Srebrenica, who held a sermon and followed up with a speech, in which he again reiterated the Serb stance in relation to the war memory, including the denial of the Srebrenica genocide.²⁰³

The last event in this series, the Srebrenica mothers' visit to the sites of atrocities comes when the general turmoil starts to settle, and usually passes without problems, as was the case this year and in previous years. However, some aspects related to this visit always make it worth noting, and there are two issues that cause contention when they appear.

First issue is that some of the places they visit are in Serb villages, and the local residents do not see these visits as welcome. These places include some villages in Zvornik, but most prominently it is the village Kravica near Bratunac. Kravica is one of the symbols of the Serb suffering, as the village was attacked and destroyed by the Army of Bosnia And Herzegovina forces from Srebrenica on Orthodox Christmas 7 January 1993.

²⁰² For 2024 – “Skandalozan govor u Potočarima: Bećiroviću se priviđala Velika Srbija” (*Scandalous speech in Potocari: Becirovic hallucinates Greater Serbia*), published on adria.press on 11.7.2024: <https://adria.press/skandalozan-govor-u-potocarima-becirovicu-se-prividjala-velika-srbija/>; for 2025 – “Skandalozan govor Bećirovića u Potočarima, optužio Srbiju za genocide” (*Becirovic's scandalous speech in Potocari: accuses Serbia of genocide*), published on tvk3.info on 11.7.2025: <https://tvk3.info/skandalozan-govor-becirovica-u-potocarima-optuzio-srbiju-za-genocid-video/>, one typical reaction - Trivić: Bećirovićeve izjave iz Potočara su sramne, Srbija i dalje pruža ruku pomirenja (*Trivic: Becirovic's statements from Potocari are shameful, Serbia still extends the hand of reconciliation*), published on avaz.ba on 11.7.2025: - <https://avaz.ba/vijesti/bih/984953/trivic-beciroviceve-izjave-iz-potocara-su-sramne-srbija-i-dalje-pruza-ruku-pomirenja>.

²⁰³ Zalazje 33 godine poslije svirepog zločina: Porodice ubijenih Srba traže pravdu (VIDEO), (*Zalazje 33 years after: Families of killed Serbs seek justice*), RTRS, 12.7.2025: <https://lat.rtrs.tv/vijesti/vijest.php?id=606901>

Two and a half years later though, the premises of the local pre-war agricultural cooperative were used as place of incarceration and murder of over 1000 Bosniaks captured after the fall of Srebrenica in July 1995. Access to this location was a highly contested issue, and the Serb population of the village often strongly protested against these visits – threatening with a protest and roadblocks. Access to the premises of the cooperative, i.e. whether the gate would be open or the mothers would lay flowers on the fence, in some years became a matter of high importance, requiring involvement and mediation from the local political authorities and international organisations. Two years ago, in a move contested strongly by the Bosniak victims' associations, political representatives and Memorial Centre Potocari, then Mayor of Bratunac refurbished the premises and built a new fence around, hence the question of access has been put aside, but the controversy remains in the minds of the stakeholders and the community.²⁰⁴

The second contentious issue that will sooner or later come back on the top of the agenda is the question of marking this place as a site of atrocities against Bosniaks, which is another issue that the Serb community opposes strongly. Earlier requests to place a memorial plaque were met with silence or refusal, but the issue remains open. Serbs from Kravica, enjoying the strong support from the wider Serb community, is against placing any memorial plaque to Bosniaks, let alone one that would contain word „genocide“ on it. The perception of the Serb community is that the Srebrenica mothers' intention is to remind them of the destruction of the village, and that laying flowers at the cooperative is used as an excuse. Hence, access to Kravica and the issue of potential memorial plaque represent a symbolic battle in itself, where Srebrenica mothers' visit is perceived as an attack, and denial of access to the cooperative premises is the villagers' defence.²⁰⁵

Although there was much concern about the potential threats to the security situation in relation to the commemoration period this year, and that largely due to the general political crisis in Bosnia and Herzegovina, especially regarding the court case against the RS President Milorad Dodik, the period passed without major incidents, aside from the strong rhetoric, and symbolic

²⁰⁴ Srebrenička stratišta: Zaključana kapija u Kravici i cvijeće na ogradi (*Srebrenica sites of atrocities: Gate locked in Kravica, flowers on the fence*), 13.7.2022 Federalna TV: <https://federalna.ba/prezivjele-zrtve-genocida-posjecu-mjesta-stradanja-svojih-najmilijih-1ohfh>

²⁰⁵ Discussed in Interview #13 with a local political representative, and again with the same person in Interview #57

battles involving pictures, flags and provocative music. Still, the period contributed again to the deepening of divisions and signals two irreconcilable views on war memory and a lack of interest in overcoming the ethnic divide, which affect the ability of the two communities to work toward reconciliation.

On the other hand, the same period last year was marked by more heightened tensions. The period of preparations for the commemoration and the dominance of the topics related to war memory last year coincided with the announcement, and the subsequent campaign related to the passing of the Srebrenica Resolution at the UN General Assembly. The announcement that the delegation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, supported by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and part of BiH Presidency, was working on the preparation of the UN Srebrenica Resolution had a galvanising effect on Bosnia and Herzegovina, as well as Serbia.

The resulting opposing campaigns for and against the adoption of such a resolution created such a charged atmosphere in public, that it resulted in an increased fear and anxiety among the local population, which amounted to the level of fear that the war could start again.²⁰⁶ The media overflowed with statements, analyses, views and debates, which caused some of the Bosniak returnee families to consider taking their children away to the family in the Federation of BiH, until they see what was going to happen. Few sobering and conciliatory voices, like the statements by the Mayor of Bratunac Lazar Prodanovic, were greatly ignored, while Prodanovic himself was exposed to attacks from the local hard-line nationalist circles and from within his political party.²⁰⁷

The whole endeavour itself, proclaimed to be done in the name of reconciliation, had all but the adversary effect. It is hard to expect that such experienced people involved in the preparation of the resolution would be so naive not to expect that it would cause direct and strong response from the Serbian politics, but still the proclaimed goal behind this action was to improve the inter-ethnic relations. Even some of the Bosniak returnees noted that it complicated their lives, and that apart from the general satisfaction for the victims' families and for confirming the truth

²⁰⁶ Confirmed again in a number of interviews conducted for this paper (#11, #13, #32, #61, #63, #64)

²⁰⁷ "Načelnik Bratunca Lazar Prodanović: Manimo se nove bure" (*Mayor of Bratunac Lazar Prodanovic: Let's drop the new storm*), BH Reporter on 19.5.2024.: <https://bhreporter.ba/159738-2/>

about their suffering, the returnees never had any other benefit from any Srebrenica resolution in the past.²⁰⁸

If the intention was to help the local communities face the past, the adoption of this resolution was a failure, and it showed, if nothing else, that there was no readiness on the side of the Serb community to go in that direction in this manner. As confirmed by several different instances, this endeavour, if indeed it was truly its intention, can be viewed as a „reconciliation failure“²⁰⁹. Hence, such an important document served only to be a matter of a political showdown.

In addition to these presented issues, which may be seen as the ones of a higher, political level, which then affect the local community level, a number of other issues were noted, which are primarily of the local community focus, while some of them still had a wider impact in the public. They also point to some other aspects or contents related to culture of remembrance, apart from the commemorative practices themselves.

Two of these issues relate to the events from further past, namely World War 1 and World War 2, where the respective ethnic narratives also feature diametrically opposed views.

One of them is related to the village Kragljivoda, in Srebrenica municipality. The developments related to the issues in this village were very interesting from the perspective of the negative impact of opposing memory narratives, touching on the border of mythical in some respect. Namely, during World War I, the Austro-Hungarian soldiers killed three local Serbs, which is the point where the agreement on this story stops. There are different accounts whether they were only killed there, or killed and buried there. The fact is, though, that there was a stone monument there, listing three names of the victims, which was put – on the place of burial, or the place of murder, depending on the source.²¹⁰

Before the last war, Kragljivoda was a predominantly, almost exclusively Bosniak, Muslim village, and in the war it was held by the Bosniaks until the Serb offensive in the early 1993. Bosniak forces from Kragljivoda participated in the attack on Skelani on 16 January 1993, which

²⁰⁸ Interviews with local Bosniak returnees in Srebrenica and Bratunac—(#1, #2, #4, #15, #16, #18).

²⁰⁹ “Bosnia in 2024: Disputes Over UN Resolution Highlight Reconciliation’s Failure”, published on balkaninsight.com on 23.12.2024: <https://balkaninsight.com/2024/12/23/bosnia-in-2024-disputes-over-un-resolution-highlight-reconciliations-failure/>

²¹⁰ Interviews with Srebrenica residents.

was at the time held by the Serbs. The attack was successful and resulted in over 60 Serb military and civilian victims, and a number of killed Bosniak soldiers.²¹¹

During the war, next to the location of the World War I Serb grave mark, where there was another old Bosniak grave, also from World War I, the Bosniaks started burying their casualties, establishing a cemetery. After the war, and after the Bosniak return, they continued using this cemetery, eventually erecting a memorial to the Bosniaks killed during the war, at the same time, the old Serb grave mark was removed, but was preserved by a local Bosniak and then handed to the abbot of the nearby monastery Karno.²¹²

In the beginning of 2024, the abbot started constructing a chapel across the road from the Bosniak – now memorial – cemetery, calling it the memorial chapel for the victims from World War I, and despite the opposition from the Bosniak community, who were against having a church in an exclusively Muslim village.²¹³ Later in the year, there appeared a report about the protest of the same abbot that the Bosniaks put „the war flags“ (i.e. flags with the fleur-de-lis) at their memorial cemetery, which were subsequently removed.

In addition to this, in the beginning of 2025, the same abbot took another initiative and constructed three grave places at the location where the old grave mark used to stand, right next to the Bosniak memorial, which caused a major uproar first in the community, and then in the wider public.²¹⁴ The Bosniak community saw that as a desecration of their memorial, and the abbot even received death threats on the social media. However, as the Bosniak memorial was not formally legalised either, the matter was overcome in a meeting of the municipal security forum meeting, chaired by the Srebrenica Mayor, where both Islamic Community and Serb Orthodox Church were instructed to resolve the matter in a legal procedure.

²¹¹ Ivanisevic, Milivoje, *Zlocini nad Srbima B-H 1992-1995* (2005), pp. 231-232

²¹² Interviews #12 and #14 with local residents.

²¹³ Gradi li se crkva u mjestu gdje žive Bošnjaci, a prvi Srbin udaljen pet kilometara (*Are they building a church in a Bosniak village, where first Serbs are five kilometres far*), Faktor on 13.3. 2024: <https://faktor.ba/bosna-i-hercegovina/aktuelno/gradi-li-se-crkva-na-mjestu-gdje-zive-bosnjaci-a-prvi-srbin-udaljen-pet-kilometara-20240313190538/182822>

²¹⁴ “Poznato ko je oskrnavio mezarje kod Srebrenice: “Vratili smo obilježje srpskim mučenicima”” (*Revealed who desecrated the cemetery near Srebrenica: ‘We returned the monument to Serb martyrs’*), published on Oslobodjenje.ba on 20.1.2025.: "<https://www.oslobodjenje.ba/vijesti/bih/poznato-ko-je-oskrnavio-mezarje-kod-srebrenice-vratili-smo-obiljezje-srpskim-mucenicima-1014527/>

As the matter was perceived in the Bosniak public as a threat to Bosniak returnees in Srebrenica it resounded in the media for a while. In February, it prompted Turkish EUFOR to send a patrol to Srebrenica, where they appeared with prominently displayed Turkish flags, which was now perceived as provocation by the Serb community.²¹⁵

So, not only was there a dispute on the community level, related to the disagreements over the matter related to war and memory, this time drawing back to World War 1, and the public debate which again poisoned the atmosphere and caused the ethnic polarisation, this time it involved the representatives of the international community. This only strengthened the local perceptions of the bias of the international representatives, along the established lines, which is confirmed by the open letter that the abbot from Karno monastery sent to EUFOR in protest over the perceived intimidation.²¹⁶

One other instance shows the deep division regarding the war memory originating from before the last war, but again in connection with the constructed narratives regarding the memory. On a hill overlooking the centre of Srebrenica town, there is a memorial from the socialist period, with a memorial plaque dedicated to the „victims of fascism“, i.e. victims of the fascist/ustase regime during World War II. In 2015, then Mayor of Srebrenica, local priest and other members of the Serb community replaced this memorial plaque, and put a new one, with a more precise description – „Serb victims of ustase regime“. ²¹⁷ Again, one instance of different memory which has become part of the new differing narratives of the past, which cause, albeit a smaller intra-community disagreement.

World War 1 then features in another local disagreement, regarding the role of a Serbian army officer Major Kosta Todorovic, who participated and lost his life in the actions against Austria-Hungary, getting him a memorial mark in the town centre between the two world wars, which was then removed by the ustase, and returned during socialist Yugoslavia. His name was given to one of the local schools in the municipality, but his name is also a divisive issue in the sphere of

²¹⁵ “SPREMNI SMO DJELOVATI U OKVIRU MANDATA” Turske trupe EUFOR ušle u Srebrenicu” (*We are prepared to act within our mandate: Turkish EUFOR troops entered Srebrenica*), published on srpskainfo.com on 24.2.2025: <https://srpskainfo.com/spremni-smo-djelovati-u-okviru-mandata-turske-trupe-eufor-usle-u-srebrenicu/>

²¹⁶ See announcement on Monastery Karno Facebook page from 26.2.2025: <https://www.facebook.com/share/p/1AzqPtHL7S/>

²¹⁷ “Srebrenica - nadgrobna ploča za žrtve ustaških zločina” (*Srebrenica – grave mark for victims of ustase crimes*), published on rtrs.tv on 1.6.2015: <https://lat.rtrs.tv/vijesti/vijest.php?id=152376>

local memory culture, as the Bosniak redefined view now sees Major Todorovic as an exponent of Serb expansionism, whereas the Serb community persists with the earlier view of Major Todorovic as a symbol of liberation.²¹⁸

And finally, to conclude this part, only a mention of several other contested issues that were noted in relation to Srebrenica and the memory. These include the local ethnic division which occurred in 2024 over the initiative and the subsequent change of the names of streets and squares in Srebrenica, as well as the disputes regarding some specific locations of suffering during the last war, which resulted even in the placement of two memorial plaques on the building of the old police station, which was to both communities a place where their compatriots were kept, tortured or killed at different times during the war when either of the sides controlled Srebrenica.

4.3 Sarajevo/East Sarajevo – Memory Rivalries

Another example of the strong antagonism along the Serb-Bosniak memory conflict axis is the area of Sarajevo (FBiH) and East Sarajevo (RS). The latter was formed on the outskirts and the suburbs of Sarajevo, following the Dayton Peace Agreement's establishment of the Inter-Entity Boundary Line. Considering the importance of the location as the capital of Bosnia and Herzegovina, and the seat of the state and Federation of BiH entity institutions, as well the importance of East Sarajevo to the Republika Srpska, these two communities present a big reservoir of memory confrontation, and the frequent manifestations of conflicted memory are a cause for the public friction between the mayors of the two cities.

The main source of the divide is the different institutionalisation of the causes of war and the war events, where the Bosniak side derive their memory based on the fact of the war-long Serb siege, and the defence by the Army of Bosnia and Herzegovina against the Serb aggression. On the other hand, the Serb narrative is also based on the story of defence, i.e. that it was actually the Serb side that defended itself, and not the Bosniak, denying, minimising or reinterpreting the stances held by the Bosniaks.

²¹⁸ Interviews #12, #16 and #17 with Srebrenica residents and a local political representative.

This divide is perhaps best exemplified by the issue of commemoration of „Dobrovoljacka Street“, an attack, or a battle, depending on the ethnic lenses, from May 1992. While the Bosniaks mark the date as a successful defence battle, the Serbs commemorate the soldiers killed in this incident. On the commemoration day, the Serb representatives and the families of the killed visit Sarajevo, but these visits are always fraught with complications and even security concerns, which caused the RS authorities to dislocate the commemoration to East Sarajevo on some occasions in the past.²¹⁹

Some of the key manifestations of these differences are related to several disputed memorial plaques/memorials, which are placed on both sides of the city. The first example is the memorial plaque, put right after the Inter-Entity Boundary Line at the suburb of Vraca, commemorating the lining up of the Serb army by General Ratko Mladic, now a convicted war criminal serving the prison sentence, which took place in the early stages of the war. The existence of this memorial plaque is seen as an expression of patriotism and gratitude to General Mladic from the Serb community, while the Bosniaks experience it as a ruthless provocation. The plaque is a place of much controversy, and was damaged on several instances, most recently in April 2025. Every time this happens, it causes another round of public spat resulting in deepening of the divisions. A number of initiatives were launched requesting the removal of the plaque.²²⁰

The second plaque is the one placed on the wall of the reconstructed Old Town Hall building, a national heritage building heavily damaged by the Serb artillery during the war. The building was reconstructed and reopened in 2014, but the memorial plaque was on its wall since 2012, stating that the building was destroyed by „the Serb criminals“. Not that it stated any wrong fact, but the wording is perceived as generalising, qualifying all Serbs as criminals. However, it looks like the wording served more as a reference in some other disputes related to the placement of memorial plaques, including the one on the old police building mentioned above, which notes „the Muslim criminals“.

More recently, this text was utilised in the expression of dissatisfaction by part of the Serb community regarding the memorial mark erected at the site Kazani, on a hill above Sarajevo,

²¹⁹ All interviewed interlocutors from Sarajevo highlighted this particular event (interviews #43-51).

²²⁰ „Ponovo oštećena spomen ploča ratnom zločincu Ratku Mladiću na Vracama“ (*Memorial plaque to Ratko Mladic on Vraca damaged again*), N1 on 28.4.2025: <https://n1info.ba/vijesti/spomen-ploca-vraca-ratko-mladic-ratni-zlocinac/>

where a number of Sarajevo Serbs (and Croats), who remained in Sarajevo during the siege, were executed arbitrarily by several members of the Army of Bosnia and Herzegovina.²²¹ The Army of Bosnia and Herzegovina punished the perpetrators even during the war, and the very placing of this memorial by Sarajevo authorities was a huge step forward toward facing the past and reconciliation of the two communities. However, the Serb politics holds that this memorial should also name the perpetrators (which it does not mention) and continues to problematise the issue.

Several other issues and differing views appear on a regular basis within the memory sphere, and continue to cause divisions. One of the most prominent ones are the commemorations of the Markale market massacres from 1994 and 1995, when the mortars hit the place while it was full of people, resulting in dozens of dead and hundreds of wounded. The Serb side has constantly denied responsibility, despite the court verdicts, claiming that the incidents were framed by the Army of Bosnia and Herzegovina in order to prompt an international intervention. In the most recent instance, in February 2025, the East Sarajevo Serbs published a monography of the RS Army Corps, who publication coincided with the commemoration of one of the two Markale events, causing strong reactions from the FBiH Sarajevo side.²²²

Another issue of memorial contention is the exodus of the Serb population from the Sarajevo suburbs, controlled by the Serbs at the end of the war, but declared part of the Federation of BiH in Dayton. This mass movement of the Serb population, when many even undug the graves and transferred the remains of their deceased relatives to different locations in the Republika Srpska, is felt like a major injustice among the Serb community, and continues to serve as a source of grievance. One part of the controversy is whether they had to leave en masse at all, which the two sides have the opposing views on.

²²¹ "Sraman natpis na spomeniku na Kazanima" *Shameful inscription on Kazani monument*), Filter portal on 29.9.2023:

<https://www.citajfilter.com/2023/09/%D1%81%D1%80%D0%B0%D0%BC%D0%B0%D0%BD-%D0%BD%D0%B0%D1%82%D0%BF%D0%B8%D1%81-%D0%BD%D0%B0-%D1%81%D0%BF%D0%BE%D0%BC%D0%B5%D0%BD%D0%B8%D0%BA%D1%83-%D0%BD%D0%B0-%D0%BA%D0%B0%D0%B7%D0%B0%D0%BD%D0%B8%D0%BC/?script=lat>

²²² "Novo ubijanje žrtava na Markalama: Promovirana monografija Sarajevsko-romanijskog korpusa, promotor optuženi za zločine u Kotor-Varoši i Mladićev svjedok!" (*New killing of Markale victims: Promotion of monograph of Sarajevo-Romanija Corps, promoter accused of crimes in Kotor Varos and Mladic's witness!*). published on stav.ba: <https://stav.ba/vijest/novo-ubijanje-zrtava-na-markalama-promovirana-monografija-sarajevsko-romanijskog-korpusa-promotor-optuzeni-za-zlocine-u-kotor-varosi-i-mladicev-svjedok-/31407>

Finally, this research noted that the Serb side of the Sarajevo dividing line has also increased the level of their remembrance activities in the recent years, in the same way as the Serbs in Bratunac and Srebrenica.²²³ Thus, the East Sarajevo will get the memorial to the killed Serb children of Sarajevo (as opposed to the existing monument to the killed children during the Sarajevo siege in the Sarajevo centre), as well as a central memorial to the Serb victims from the wider area of Sarajevo during the war.²²⁴

Sarajevo memorialisation was partly the subject of 2024 report by the Belgrade-based RECOM initiative, where they looked into the cases of Kazani and Markale.²²⁵ First of all this reports notes a positive step by erecting the monument at Markale, it highlights the different views held by the two communities in Sarajevo in relation to Kazani memorial, and to commemoration of Markale massacres. RECOM also notes the increase of interest in commemorative practices.

To a greater depth, the quoted book *Peace and Politics of Memory*²²⁶ also tackles the problems of memorialisation in Sarajevo. Their findings confirm the conclusions of this research and analysis, that the memorialisation plays a huge role in the continuation of divisions between the communities in Bosnia and Herzegovina, noting the competing victimhood narratives²²⁷, and the problems with the cemented identities based on the war memory²²⁸, including their own reference to Kazani memorial issue.²²⁹

As it perfectly captures the essence of the problems arising from conflicting memory narratives, I share here another quote from the same research: „The construction of peace is thus built upon the same logic of ethnic divisionism of the war, and the ethno-political centrifugal powers of the war are continued with other means, as ethno-nationalists benefit from a political framework that emphasises the protection of group interests and identities.“²³⁰

²²³ Interviews #44, #45, #48 and #49.

²²⁴ „Izgradnja memorijalnog spomen-kompleksa ide planiranom dinamikom“ (*Construction of the memorial complex proceeds as planned*), RTRS on 20.7.2024: <https://lat.rtrs.tv/vijesti/vijest.php?id=563237>

²²⁵ RECOM, *Decade of Remembrance, Memory Politics and Commemorative Practices in the Post-Yugoslav Countries* (2024), pp. 36 and 41, respectively.

²²⁶ Mannergren et al., op. cit.

²²⁷ Mannergren et al., ibid., p. 69

²²⁸ Mannergren et al., ibid., p. 75

²²⁹ Mannergren et al., ibid., p. 95

²³⁰ Mannergren et al., ibid., p. 68

4.4 Mostar – Invisible Wall, Supported by Divided Memory

Mostar is a representative of another inter-ethnic conflict axis in Bosnia and Herzegovina, namely the one involving Bosniaks and Croats. It is the core location of this side of conflict, with a potential to deteriorate further, especially after the developments during the past few years, with a growing number of public disputes, and especially a growing number of incidents, in particular those involving youths.²³¹ Mostar dwells as a divided city, where the division is deep despite physical proximity of the two sides of the town, and the sharing of the physical space. This division is reflected throughout the social and political fabric, most significantly in education, with a persisting phenomenon of „two schools under one roof“, where children of Croat and Bosniak ethnicity do not attend classes together.

Culture of remembrance serves to heat these divisions, and support the animosity created during the war, and maintained in the post-war period. And although the main cracks between the two communities persist on other contentious issues, mainly of political nature and in relation to the disputes over the developments regarding the central zone of Mostar, the issues related to memory underlie these, along with the memory specific antagonisms.²³²

The most notorious example of memory related division in Mostar is related to the site of „Heliodrom“, pre-war small helicopter landing site, which served as a concentration camp for Bosniaks, and to a smaller extent Serbs from Mostar, and which was controlled by the Croat Defense Council units (HVO). Some of the buildings related to Heliodrom are administered by Mostar University, who have refused to authorise access to the former camp inmates and other attendees at the annual commemoration of the Heliodrom camp.²³³

At the same time, this same HVO erected a monument to their killed comrades from the war, at the very same location, next to the former concentration camp that they ran. The monument was

²³¹ Novi incident u Mostaru: Maloljetnici brutalno pretučeni, građani zahtijevaju hitne mjere za bezbjednost (*New incident in Mostar: Juveniles brutally beaten, citizens demand urgent security measures*), Info Bijeljina on 2.9.2024: <https://infobijeljina.com/vijesti/novi-incident-u-mostaru--maloljetnici-brutalno-pretuceni--gradjani-zahtijevaju-hitne-mjere-za-bezbijednost>

²³² „Pravda po mjeri politike: Mostar traži odgovor na nejednak tretman kulturnih projekata” (*Justice according to politics: Mostar seeks an answer to unequal treatment of cultural projects*), Klix on 11.5.2025: <https://www.klix.ba/vijesti/bih/pravda-po-mjeri-politike-mostar-trazi-odgovor-na-nejednak-tretman-kulturnih-projekata/250505137>

²³³ This example was cited as one of the most prominent in maintaining the atmosphere of animosity in Mostar in the interview with an employee of an international organisation there (Interview #34, and again #62).

unveiled in June this year, causing strong reactions, and feeding the Bosniak-Croat divide and animosities. Formal legality of the establishment of this monument cannot be questioned, though, but the question of morality – and the intention – remains.²³⁴

Occasional other outbursts of discord and intolerance, like the one related to the commemoration of the war crime at the location Uborak, instead of dealing with the war victims and the ways to overcome the past, in fact triggered a protest dominated by the nationalist rhetoric the following day.²³⁵

World War II history also plays a role in the construction and support of new identities, hence the desecration of the Partisan Memorial Cemetery does not come as a surprise, although it consternated part of the Mostar, as well as wider public.²³⁶

One additional aspect of the memory related problems in Mostar is the attitude of the political leadership towards the convicted war criminals, who have received support and attention upon serving their prison sentences. Especially during November, which is the month of several important anniversaries for the Croat community, these issues come into the fore (anniversary of the establishment of Herzeg-Bosnia, anniversary of the destruction of the Old Bridge, as well as the anniversary of the ICTY verdict which declared Croat creation of Herzeg-Bosnia as a joint criminal enterprise).²³⁷

4.5 Prijedor – Obstruction and Denial

As a site of major war atrocities, especially from the beginning of the 1992-95 war, Prijedor also carries a heavy burden of war legacy – and separate cultures of remembrance between the local Serb and Bosniak communities. During the commemorative periods, these differences have a wider outreach, causing the greater public polarisation.

²³⁴ “Na mjestu logora Heliudrom otkriven spomenik HVO-u” (*Monument to HVO unveiled at the site of war prison camp*). Depo on 11.6.2024: <https://depo.ba/clanak/258724/na-mjestu-logora-heliudrom-otkriven-spomenik-hvo-u-hrvatski-ministar-porucio-ovdje-sam-branio-nas-narod>

²³⁵ Markovina, Dragan, „*Suocavanje i druge bajke*”, in *Oslobodjenje* from 31.5.2024, p. 11.

²³⁶ “Ponovo vandalizovano Partizansko groblje u Mostaru” (*Partizan cemetery in Mostar vandalised again*), Detektor on 14.6.2022: <https://mapiranjemrznje.detektor.ba/articles/incident/65-ponovo-vandalizovano-partizansko-groblje-u-mostaru>

²³⁷ Interview #34

The topic of Prijedor commemorations was covered also in the report by the RECOM²³⁸, noting the earlier problems regarding the denial of authorisation by the authorities to hold commemorative events. Though this obstacle has been overcome, there still remain the differing views which dictate the antagonisms around the commemoration days.

Prijedor Bosniaks commemorate three prison camps (Omarska, Keraterm and Trnopolje), which existed in the territory of Prijedor during the first several months of the war in 1992, as well as the „White Ribbon Day“. The latter takes place on 31.5. every year and commemorates the period from the beginning of the war when Bosniak and Croat residents of Prijedor were ordered to put the white sheets on the windows of their homes, as a sign of loyalty to the new Serb authorities, who had gained control over the town. In this way, the non-Serb households were clearly marked and the “White Ribbon Day” is meant to symbolically remind of the prosecution from the beginning of the 1992-95 war in Prijedor.²³⁹

This year in particular, the White Ribbon Day commemoration served as a basis for the denial of crimes, with the publicised denial by a convicted local war criminal Aleksandar Knjeginic, who stated that the whole story was false.²⁴⁰

Several days after the commemoration, the same person reacted with threats against the (Bosniak) RS Vice-President Camil Durakovic, due to the statement the latter gave in relation to the commemorative events in Prijedor.²⁴¹

Bosniak victims’ associations have been repeatedly denied permission to erect the monuments – namely to the killed children of Prijedor (102 children as quoted by the victims’ associations), as

²³⁸ RECOM, op. cit., p. 17

²³⁹ „U Prijedoru obilježen Dan bijelih traka“ (*White Ribbons Day marked in Prijedor*), Detektor on 31.5.2025: <https://detektor.ba/2025/05/31/u-prijedoru-obiljezen-dan-bijelih-traka/>

²⁴⁰ „Osuđeni za zločine u Prijedoru pokrenuo peticiju za zabranu Dana bijelih traka“ (*War crimes convict in Prijedor launches initiative to ban White Ribbons Day*), Detektor on 14.6.2025: <https://detektor.ba/2025/06/14/osudjeni-za-zlocine-u-prijedoru-pokrenuo-peticiju-za-zabranu-dana-bijelih-traka-upozoravaju-mirovni-aktivisti/>

²⁴¹ „Aleksandar Knjeginić uputio užasne prijetnje Bošnjacima, posebno označio Ćamila Durakovića i njegovog savjetnika“ (*Aleksandar Knjeginic directs horrible threats to Bosniaks, specifically marking Camil Durakovic and his advisor*), Klix on 21.7.2025: <https://www.klix.ba/vijesti/bih/aleksandar-knjeginjic-uputio-uzasne-prijetnje-bosnjacima-posebno-oznacio-camila-durakovica-i-njegovog-savjetnika/250721105>

well as in the former camp of Omarska.²⁴² They were able to establish a memorial near Prijedor, though, where they hold a central commemorative ceremony every year.

4.6 Other Contentious Memory Practices

As noted in the first part of this section, the list of the places that experience problems related to the issue of war memory includes many more places, the list is inexhaustible. All three ethnic conflict axes are involved, with that special remark on the Croat-Serb relations within Bosnia and Herzegovina, still, the list goes on – Bradina, Tuzla, Bijeljina, including the most recent reports on an incident related to a Croat memorial near Travnik.²⁴³ Mutually exclusive memory politics continue to serve as the engines for reproducing mutual distrust and perpetuate the social conflict.

Memorials continue to be the places of contention, whether they are announced for construction or, for those already in place, as a place of occasional desecration, the news of which mobilise and polarise the population. The example of Kravica, mentioned above, gives a good flavour of how emotional this is for the local population, and, if we are to be cynical – convenient for the local politics to continue building their divisive agendas. There is an underlying element of symbolic battles fought on other levels, and a form of reclaiming the space using the commemorative events.

Disputes over the announced memorialisation of the Serb victims in Bratunac, for example, or the disputes over marking the sites in Sarajevo's Dobrovoljacka Street, or Tuzla Column armed clash, or some others, that went a little bit more under the public radar, like and attempt of Bosniaks to erect a monument near Lopare²⁴⁴, serve to all but to proper marking of the suffering,

²⁴² „Ružama umjesto spomenika Prijedor se prisjetio ubijene djece i bijelih traka” (*With roses instead of a monument, Prijedor remembers the killed children and white ribbons*), Federalna TV on 31.5.2025: <https://www.federalna.ba/ruzama-umjesto-spomenika-prijedor-se-prisjetio-ubijene-djece-i-bijelih-traka-c6css>

²⁴³ „Objavljen snimak na kojem grupa muškaraca vrijeđa Hrvate kod spomenika HVO-u” (*Video published showing a group of men insulting Croats by the HVO monument*), Klix on 19.7.2025: <https://www.klix.ba/vijesti/crna-hronika/objavljen-snimak-na-kojem-grupa-muskaraca-vrijeda-hrvate-kod-spomenika-hvo-u-policija-radi-na-slucaju/250719081>

²⁴⁴ „Naredbom inspekcije uklonjen spomenik "ljiljan" u Koraju” (*Inspection orders removal of the monument "fleur-de-lis" in Koraj*), Radio Sarajevo on 23.10.2022: <https://radiosarajevo.ba/vijesti/bosna-i-hercegovina/naredbom-opcinske-inspekcije-uklonjen-spomenik-ljiljan-u-koraju/472826>

and trying to get the ethnic communities closer. The same goes for the occasional news of the damage or desecration of memorial plaques or cemeteries, such as those reported in Zvornik, Kladanj, Kakanj, or any other place for that matter, this list is also long, and these incidents do not often get reported. Nevertheless, every time they happen and when they are reported, they add another drop in the pool of mutual distrust, aversion and animosity.

Political abuse of commemoration, frequent inflammatory speeches by political agents take the animosities to ever higher levels. None of the sides is also immune to different forms of glorification of war criminals, the extent does vary, but the phenomenon is there, and it is not sending a good message to the victims they all swear to protect. Grievances regarding the impunity, and the lack of more efficient judicial follow-up to war crimes investigations and prosecutions, more or less justified, are there to serve the discourse of division.

Far from it being an exclusive problem in Srebrenica, the question of the names of streets and public squares is there across the board. It is a common practice for the communities to ethnicize the street names and they mostly retain exclusivity, and minority inclusion in this regard is only occasional and limited.

This list of problems continues with the general disagreement regarding the important dates and state or entity holidays, where, thankfully, the religious holidays are generally observed, obviously as they present the undisputed symbols of division.²⁴⁵ However, the dates that a society should share as memory of its important events is yet another battlefield, causing the major public spat every year. RS Day on 9 January and BiH Independence Day on 1 March are prime examples of this divide, which every time deepen the divisions and set the communities farther away from dialogue.

As already noted, memory conflicts in Bosnia and Herzegovina do not stick only to the memory of the 1992-95 war. It goes further to the past and include divided memory on Yugoslavia, World Wars I and II, , and even further in the past, recently made prominent Nevesinje Uprising from 19th century, including the spats over the mediaeval history, and whose king Tvrtko of 14th

²⁴⁵ Besides Srebrenica, the issue of holding of liberation vs. commemoration days was noted in interviews in Zvornik (Interviews #22 and #25) and Bijeljina (Interviews #29 and #30).

century was.²⁴⁶ Critical history is of no use, except to provide more ammunition for the political battleground over memory and identity.

4.7 Interview Remarks – Prevailing Pessimism

Most of interlocutors agree that there used to be much more optimism earlier on during the process of peacebuilding in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Middle-aged and older interlocutors specifically noted that there was much more optimism despite the fact that the war was much fresher in their memories. They cite different reasons for this deterioration, depending on their personal angles and circumstances, but they generally agree that the war seems much more present in their daily lives now, due to its overall presence in the public discourse.

Along with the observations and conclusions stated above, I wish to note several other remarks that I could make based on the interaction with the local residents.

First is – the farther they are away from the exact locus of certain events, the less they are aware of the details, but when it comes to the general outlines, almost all of them were aware. One exception could be made for people from Trebinje, who tended to be the least informed, but that could also be due to the local circumstances as well as personal selection, and I have not had a large enough number of contacts to make a full conclusion. Herzegovina, Trebinje as well as Mostar, appear to have a somewhat autonomous outlook.

Secondly, when it comes to the major topics, the ones that feature prominently in the public and political discourse, they were almost all aware. In case of the „genocide dispute“ (and Srebrenica resolution!), everyone was aware, and everyone had an opinion to share, and that opinion went, with certain rare modifications or reservations, along the general lines dictated by the high level politics. This shows that, even though they may not be, as they often said they were not, directly hostile to the „other“ in their community, the sense of one’s own ethnic group participation is undisputed.

²⁴⁶ „Historičari iz RS-a i Srbije optužili intelektualce iz BiH za falsifikovanje činjenica“ (*Historians from the RS and Serbia accused BiH intellectuals of falsifying the facts*), Klix on 28.12.2022: <https://www.klix.ba/vijesti/bih/historicari-iz-rs-a-i-srbije-optuzili-intelektualce-iz-bih-za-falsifikovanje-cinjenica/221228049>

Thirdly, ordinary population showed little inclination toward critical evaluation, and their occasional critical approach was more related to the matters inside their respective groups, rather than toward the identity and memory discourse that is laid on them by their political representatives. This shows a high level of balance between the political and community level in this regard. In most cases this does not seem to affect their acceptance of the presence of the other in their communities, and they tend to express cautious willingness to rectify the relations in general, but essentially expressing overall pessimism. Paradoxically, they blame politics and politicians for the situation, while not showing a stronger critical attitude toward their ethnic politics. Overall the tendency is to flock around one's own ethnic group, including politics, no matter the flaws.

Members of the civil society and employees of international organisations, or very experienced in their jobs, express different doses of pessimism, noting the role of the ethnic politics in the divisions, and particularly stressing the field of education as one of the core problems. New generations have grown apart from each other, problem which was specifically highlighted in Mostar.

CONCLUSION

This research has shown that the state of peace in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and the process of reconciliation itself are under heavy negative influence of the differing and even opposing memory politics maintained by its three ethnic communities and their political representatives. Memory work as employed by the leading political and social elites thus serve as a tool against conflict transformation, over the time increasing its adversarial effect, in the lack of meaningful and systematic practices to counter this process. Review of the practices related to the culture of remembrance showed that the creation and maintenance of identity in the opposition to the other deepens the ethno-social divide.

There is little or no room left for mutual memory, and hardly any interest now among the key political factors. Memory is used to wage the war of identities, through conflict of memory, spanning not only back to the 1992-95 war, but also to the older instances in history, including World War 2, World War 1, events from 19th century, and even mediaeval history. These clashes persist in the public sphere, often triggered by commemorative events, and have been steadily gaining prominence during the past several years. Animosities have been created and are successfully maintained and deepened, and it strikes like an advanced stage of the process of ethnic alienation.

This underlying war takes many forms in relation to the memory in general, including the question of disputed street names, symbols and flags, memorials and memorial plaques, as well as important historical dates and public holidays. This research has also noted a significant regression of peace in the Bosnian-Herzegovinian society during the period of the campaign for and against UN Resolution on Srebrenica.

These conflicts persist on two levels – political and social, public/community and individual. While political and public discourse are largely dominated by divisionism in different forms, albeit with occasional dissenting voices, the individual level still shows some inclination toward peaceful coexistence in the mixed communities, but with a noticeable anxiety and distrust during the period of increased political tension.

This war of memory is essentially set against the arrangement provided by the Dayton Peace Agreement, reaffirming the main political courses by the three political elites, which are divergent and threaten to destabilise the DPA structure. As noted in the introduction, these courses more or less successfully mark the original intention to pursue the „war goals“, without paying much heed to the potential negative (security) consequences that the DPA collapse would bring. Still, regardless, the conflict persists, fought on the other plains, seeing some new forms and repeating and reinforcing the old ones, supported largely through media, but also, maybe even more worryingly – the education. This research has touched on many of the other factors other than the memory politics alone, which support each other in order to pursue divisive processes.

It is particularly worrying that most of the problems take place in more ethnically mixed areas, as if to prove that coexistence is not possible.

As a result, the conflict persists on these other levels, resulting in cold peace, or perhaps more precisely „shallow peace“. ²⁴⁷ In the current circumstances it is hard, even ungrateful to give and forecast or suggestions of the potentially rectifying courses of action, as they have been noted by many, and basically come down to a list of hopes and well-wishing, which, without the true will of the local stakeholders, will remain a dead letter.

Still, in the year of the 30th anniversary of the DPA, there is a need to talk more and more loudly about the risks of the potential further disintegration of Bosnia and Herzegovina ²⁴⁸, or the opening of a Pandora's Box with its potential unpacking. ²⁴⁹ The partial solutions employed so far have not brought great results, or have not lasted and have become undone. However, risking even this level of achievement must not be abandoned before there is currently little will, as the alternatives seem much more threatening.

Critical approach to the culture of remembrance, as well as critical approach to everything else, presupposes a higher level of intellectual emancipation, which would have to involve exactly those who are working against it, as it would not work in their favour. It seems that the primary

²⁴⁷ Mannergren et al., op. cit., p. 2. I find this term most suitable to describe the state of peace in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

²⁴⁸ Tindemans, Leo et al., *Unfinished Peace – Report of the International Commission on the Balkans* (1996), p. xxiv

²⁴⁹ Bose, op. cit., p. 30

task would be to return to communication and dialogue, and get the key stakeholders back to the same table, honest and respectful, as what Bosnia and Herzegovina, as well as the region needs most of all is to truly bury the hatchets.

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APPENDIX 1

Photo 1 – Bosniak monument in Straziste, Visegrad, with the word „genocide“ scraped off



APPENDIX 2

Photo 2 – Poster for Bosniak commemoration in Bratunac in 2024, announcing it as a genocide commemoration



APPENDIX 3

Photo 3 – One of the announcements of the Serb commemoration in Bratunac 2025, mimicking the Srebrenica genocide wording, calling the crime against the Serbs a genocide

