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(S)he Walks: Gendered Audiences, Memory and Representation in Post-Yugoslav Space

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Summary

Based on ethnographic studies carried out during commemorations in Vukovar and Srebrenica, this paper analyses gendered representations of said mnemonic events. Specific practices that incorporate both military and civilian components, as well as discourse on heroism and victimhood, lay at the focus of this research: the Column of Remembrance in Vukovar and the Nezuk to Potočari Peace March.

Following the theoretical findings on the nexus between memory and gender, the main actors and their agency are studied from the gender perspective. The symbolic capital of the two sites of memory and transformations of memorial practices impact the representation of gender on both state and grassroots levels and give an insight into the questions this paper asks:

Why are women present in such large numbers in both Vukovar and in Srebrenica? How is gender represented in the course of these commemorations? What are the political implications of such choices? What kind of strategies are used in official and grassroots initiatives? Finally, how is it connected to gender?

Keywords: Commemoration, Gender, Memory Entrepreneurs, Vukovar, Srebrenica

Introduction

The calendar of war-related commemorations in the post-Yugoslav countries, although exhibiting a long list of dates, is broadcast via mainstream media and/or talked about in public only for a handful of events. Two such events are the key episodes of the 1991-1995 wars in Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina: the fall of Vukovar and the Srebrenica genocide. At the centre of both commemorations are civilian victims, and consequently destruction of communities and social ties. Simultaneously, albeit to a lesser extent, the military components such as the battle for Vukovar or the resist-

ance of the Army of Bosnia and Herzegovina are present in mnemonic practices and official historiography. They consequently interact with the narrative about the fate of the civilian population, setting the tone of the commemorative event.

Taking into account interactions between civilian and military elements, this paper analyzes the role of gender in commemorative rituals, that is in which way gender is "staged" symbolically and physically. My point of departure involves two comparable, yet in many points divergent, case studies: the Column of Remembrance of the Vukovar Remembrance Day in Croatia and the Nezuk to Potočari Peace March, which is organised within the Srebrenica Genocide Remembrance week in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Both case studies are fractions of the vast memorial landscape related to the remembering of Vukovar and Srebrenica war episodes. However, the rationale for comparison of these particular events lays in a double focus present in the chosen mnemonic practices: that of civilian victims combined with a strong reference to the war actions and military units.

War commemorations typically attract a predominantly male audience, the exception being female members of the bereaved families of the fallen. Moreover, when war commemorations are performed as a movement requiring certain physical effort, the gender balance is even more skewed. However, this is not the case in either of the two observed events. This state of affairs prompts many questions: Why are women present in such large numbers in both Vukovar and Srebrenica? How is gender represented in the course of these commemorations? What are the political implications of such choices? What kinds of strategies are used in official and grassroots initiatives?

The first part of this paper introduces a theoretical overview of gender and memory. It is followed by a brief overview of the historical context, while the central part of the paper is dedicated to the analysis of the research questions. Finally, a brief conclusion about gender and memorialisation is given at the end.

Theoretical Framework – Collective Memory and Gender

This paper is based on the theoretical framework of memory studies, in order to follow how a specific group deals with the past and establishes, develops and (re)invents its proper collective identity. The term "collective memory" (Halbwachs, 1992) should not be understood as a sum of individual memories, but as a "body of reusable texts, images, and rituals specific to each society in each epoch, whose 'cultivation' serves to stabilise and convey that society's self-image" (Assmann and Czaplicka, 1995). Moreover, the remembrance and forgetting at the collective level are influenced by "politics of memory" (Barahona de Brito, 2010) at the official/state level, and various forms of communitarian responses to it, i.e. cultural and public memory. Ritual practices such as commemorations are at the focus of this

research, and in particular those dealing with memories of defeat. Olick and Robbins (1998) underline the processual nature of the collective memory: instead of being a static category, it is rather a dynamic process involving members of the specific community. Similarly, participation in commemorative practice not only demonstrates what Durkheim (1995) named "conscience collective", but reaffirms the sense of belonging and unity with a specific "mnemonic community" (Zerubavel, 2003). The performative nature of collective memory and collective identity operates in relation to everyday life practices and engages with national symbols, rituals and material sites. The sense of togetherness during commemorative events is bound to emotional response to the shared experience (Goffman) and acts of micro-solidarities (Collins, 2004).

However, members of such heterogeneous society act from different social positions and within their gender roles. Scholarly research on the relation of gender and commemorative and other mnemonic practices has predominantly focused on gendered representation of historical events, and to a much lesser extent on the role of gender in the commemorative events themselves. Similarly, transnational measures such as United Nations Security Council's 1325 Landmark Resolution on Women, Peace and Security aiming to promote a wider awareness of gender-based issues and women's participation in post-conflict redevelopment and transitional processes, do not touch on memory, commemoration, or history-telling.[1] Feminist scholarship has critically engaged with the representation of women in Holocaust remembrance (for an overview, see Jacobs, 2008), and dealt with war memorialisation from a gender point of view (Sherman, 1996). There is, however, a prominent research gap on contemporary forms of commemoration in transitional post-conflict societies (McDowell, 2008; Brown, 2014). Research of gender representations related to war and post-war societies in the region of the former Yugoslavia have touched upon topics of violence (Helms, 2013; Močnik, 2020), masculinity (Schaüble, 2014), paramilitary (Wiegman, Kaplan and Žarkov, 2007) and transitional justice (Nettelfield and Wagner, 2014), leaving mnemonic practices out of core focus.

Although the connection between gendered representations of the war and politics of memory is undisputed, this research's main interest lies in the latter. In particular, the focus is laid on finding out differences in mnemonic patterns, that is, the exceptions from *a priori* expected performativity related to gender. Scholars have pointed out that the gender approaches to commemoration of the past conflicts are generally depicting "women [as] invisible or mentioned in passing or referenced only in particular ways" (Rooney, 2007, p. 8), mainly as mothers, widows or rape

[1] https://www.un.org/womenwatch/osagi/wps/

victims, and not as "active agents who perform a multitude of roles" (Mannergren Selimovic, 2020). If such representations are understood as political strategies determining power relations, the further research step shall analyze how those elite-produced gendered narratives resonate with the audiences attending the commemoration. However, besides power dynamics, our attention is equally driven to underline the role of silence and omission, as well as the transformative and dynamic character of mnemonic practice. Consequently, the focus is laid on the way the fall of Vukovar or the Srebrenica genocide are being represented. The transformation of practices of mourning over time from militarized to victimhood societies (Buckley-Zistel and Schäfer, 2014) and back is compared and related with representation of gender.

Methodology

This research is based on the ethnographic study trips to Vukovar between 2012 and 2018 on the occasion of the Day of Remembrance, and to Srebrenica during the Peace March in 2018. In Vukovar, I have joined the Column of Remembrance several times, but have also participated in various civil society initiatives related to war memorialisation. The audience in Croatia consists of persons coming from all parts of the country as well as of diaspora groups. They all have different social and cultural backgrounds and are not necessarily directly affected by or involved in the war activities of the 1990s.

In the Srebrenica Peace March, on the other hand, not only local population or diaspora members took part, but also diverse groups from Turkey and Iran (mostly groups with religious background such as pilgrims and scouts), Western Europe and the USA (predominantly in the framework of educational activities). I have consulted additional material, mainly descriptions of the places of suffering from the "mountaineer booklets"[2] and transcripts of the recorded speeches of organizational committee members and political representatives.

Finally, for both cases, I've compared my fieldwork notes with the media outlets that are valuable sources tracing the official politics of memory and prominent mnemonic actors. This is particularly useful in the case of Vukovar, where no official speeches were given since the year 2000.

Here, some crucial differences between the two analysed cases have to be underlined. First, the Vukovar event is the main commemorative activity related to the events from 18 November 1991, whereas the Peace March is not. Therefore, the amount of political influence and leverage, as well as the media attention, is hardly comparable. In addition, official symbols such as flags or military insignia have different meanings in those two contexts, especially when it comes to former, some-

[2] The author of the publication is Sarajevo Alpine Club "Fasto".

times illegal, ones. Finally, the size and duration of the selected case studies is not similar: Vukovar Column of Remembrance hosts usually at least ten thousand participants (with peak years counting up to one hundred thousand) and is performed in a couple of hours' time. On the other hand, around five thousand persons walk the Peace March for three full days, allowing thus much more interactions and informal setting. Nevertheless, these cases are intersecting in discourses on heroism and victimhood, as well as in the double focus on the military and civilian elements. This research starts precisely from this point of intersection and analyses social, political and cultural factors impacting gender in those specific circumstances.

Historical Background and Legacy of the *Homeland War* in Vukovar

During the 1991-1995 war for Croatian independence, the town of Vukovar was almost completely ruined, after a three months siege and attacks of the Yugoslav People's Army (*Jugoslovenska narodna armija* – JNA), members of the Territorial Defence (*Teritorijalna obrana* – TO), and various paramilitary units from Serbia.[3] The fall of the town on 18 November 1991 was reported in Serbian media as "liberation".[4]

The official historical narrative of the Homeland war, in which Vukovar holds a central place, combines discourses of heroism (in defending the country) with that of victimhood (suffering aggression). The commemorative event, although running in a similar vein for almost twenty years, is subject to changes in focus of framing the 1991 war episode.

The chosen wording, i.e., "the fall of Vukovar", as 18 November was first labelled, made room for an ever more frequent "Day of Remembrance", silencing thus the military defeat and glorifying the resistance and heroic efforts of the defenders.[5] Institutionalised confirmation of this choice came in 1999 when the Croatian Parliament proclaimed 18 November to be the *Day of Remembrance of the Victim of Vukovar*. The use of the term "victim" in relation to the town itself, as opposed to the human losses, i.e. victims of the attacks, strengthened the symbolic importance of the physical place, transforming it thus in a *lieu de mémoire*.[6] The most recent acknowledgement of its status was made in 2019 when the previous status

[3] Meaning the territory of one of the SFRY's six constituent republics, corresponding to the present Republic of Serbia, which was from 1992 to 2006 the main power element in the states of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and Serbia and Montenegro. I will use the term Serbia in order to overcome possible ambiguities.

[4] For example, the daily *Politika* or the national broadcasting agency RTS.

[5] For a detailed analysis of media frames about Vukovar, see Ljubojevic, 2019.

[6] There is an extensive literature on memorialisation of the fall of Vukovar in national and transnational dimensions. See, for example: Ljubojevic, 2021; Pavlaković and Pauković, 2019; Karačić, Banjeglav and Govedarica, 2012; Banjeglav, 2012; Schäuble, 2014.

of memorial day was overturned into national public holiday.[7] In 1999, the commemoration program instituted a tradition of so-called Column of Remembrance: a memorial walk starting at the Vukovar hospital and connecting it with the Memorial Cemetery of the Victims of the Homeland War.

Commemoration in Vukovar – Between Heroism and Piety

Vukovar's Column of Remembrance is a top-down mnemonic practice, organised for the occasion of the Remembrance Day on 18 November. In particular, it is the central episode in a commemoration event occupying the majority of the live media transmission. It represents the connection between the two memorial stations: Vukovar Hospital and the Memorial Cemetery of The Victims of Homeland War. The first is *de facto* representing a symbol of the suffering of civilians[8] and the latter pays respect to the soldiers fallen during the defence of the town. The program in front of the hospital starts with the national anthem, followed by a choice of selected poems and songs associated with the town. The Column is formed and led by the flag bearers of military units involved in the battle for Vukovar, behind which walk representatives of political and military elites. The Column's organisational protocol is strictly determined: the state's political and military elite is leading the way with the war veterans – defenders of Vukovar, and family members of killed and missing persons. Once arrived at the Memorial Cemetery, wreaths are laid, and the commemoration is concluded with the religious ceremony. The development of the ceremony thus crosses from the civilian to the military sphere, from mundane to clerical, associating in this way military losses with the afterlife in religious and symbolic terms. Since the year 2000, there are no speeches during the commemoration, after complaints raised by war veterans' organizations who stood against "the politicisation of the event". However, messages of representatives of the political elites and other relevant social actors are transmitted during the live TV coverage, but are not heard on site. The absence of talk is filled with an abundance of visual elements and symbols – from flags to messages in and outside of the Column. The Vukovar commemoration therefore represents a particular situation of exclusion and inclusion: while the narratives of the suffering and material devastation are well documented in the public space and familiar to every citizen, the authentic place operates with non-verbal symbols. Such circumstances allow for a participant to interpret and self-position him/herself in the framework of mnemonic practice. These empty spots are where gender and gendered histories/memories could be negotiated.

[7] Zakon o blagdanima, spomendanima i neradnim danima u Republici Hrvatskoj. 2019. *Narodne novine*, 110, 14 November 2019 (Accessed: 20 March 2020).

[8] See Vukovar hospital case before the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia: https://www.icty.org/x/cases/mrksic/cis/en/cis_mrksic_al_en.pdf

Actors and Agency

The bystander can easily recognise some of the main mnemonic actors and the resulting hierarchy of remembrance: it being an official commemoration, the political elite and diplomatic representatives are walking in the front rows, followed by the military exponents who are dressed in uniforms and are holding the flags of the army units involved in the defence of Vukovar, while members of war veteran associations have their insignias or banners. Women associations' representatives, on the other hand, do not carry visual marks or written features. This confirms the thesis that, "in the context of national imaginaries, dominant memory is often centred around the idealized figure of the masculine soldier" (Ashplant, Dawson and Roper, 2000). As a result, the meanings and memories of others who have sacrificed and suffered – above all women – are relegated to the margins. Sarah Bulmer and Maya Eichler (2017, p. 175) convincingly argue that war veterans "illustrate that the unmaking of a militarized masculine identity is never complete, much as the archetype of militarized masculinity can never be fully achieved." The commemoration in Vukovar, in which veterans are increasingly strengthening their agency (especially from 2013 onwards) has consequently become visibly more militarized. The war veterans' agency had important political implications in Croatia – they have exercised a major influence over the official politics of memory in Vukovar after the 2013 anti-Cyrillic protest, triggered by the implementation of Croatian minority rights legislation (Ljubojević, 2016). The protests regarding the introduction of Serbian language and writing in official use peaked during the commemoration in 2013, when the trajectory according to the protocol for the members of the diplomatic core and Croatian political elites was interrupted. The so-called *Headquarters for the Defence of Croatian Vukovar* (*Stožer za obranu hrvatskog Vukovara*), which organised the protests, claimed a division between "the people" vs. "the elite", i.e. "Vukovarian" and "non-Vukovarian" Croatia along ideological lines. Further militarisation of the commemoration was enabled after the acquittal of former Croatian generals Gotovina and Markač at the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia. Political elites from both sides of the ideological spectrum made an effort to demonstrate continuity of the military victory in 1995 and the judicial one in 2012. Said events thus mark the change in power dynamics and "ownership" of the commemoration. The visibility of veteran organisation policies and their political leverage rose into the centre of the narrative about the war in Vukovar and Croatia. Such a state of affairs only reaffirmed the symbolic importance of the town of Vukovar, not only by sealing its "piety status" in terms of commemorative program name, but also by transforming the Day of Remembrance from Memory Day (*spomendan*) to national public holiday (*državni praznik*).[9]

[9] Zakon o blagdanima, spomendanima i neradnim danima u Republici Hrvatskoj. 2019. *Narodne novine*, 110, 14 November 2019 (Accessed: 20 March 2020).

At the same time, political, i.e. state actors, as well as religious exponents, continued to promote the narrative of victimhood. Such a narrative, noticeable not only in the context of framing defeats and military losses, mirrors the politics of memory on a broader, transnational level of the European Union, where human rights standards and memorialisation strategies, particularly of WWII, have put victims in focus. Representations of European cultural memory, especially those related to the traumatic events of WWII, became fertile soil for "wars of memory" in attempts to frame the history of the Second World War (Welzer, 2007). Moreover, the process of "universalisation of the Holocaust" (Eckel and Moisel, 2008) and subsequent development of human rights as European values brought "a change in the focus of remembrance: the figure of the hero-martyr [...] has been replaced by the victim" (Radonić, 2017). While the position of hero is negotiated through his/her deeds and victories, the position of victim produces power through moral virtue and affective alignment; thus, victimhood is glorified (Winter, 2006, p. 61). Transposed to the Croatian context, the development of the victimhood discourse is particularly visible in the choice of the Vukovar commemoration program name: from the Biblical connotations like the label from 2003 "White cross sends a warning", via "Pilgrimage towards Croatian freedom" (2006) and "Vukovar – holy name" (2012) to personifications of the victim-town: "Vukovar is Our Beautiful, Vukovar is my Croatia" (2008), "Vukovar is yesterday, today, tomorrow" (2009), "Vukovar – a winner, because it's a victim" (2010) and "Vukovar – a place of special piety" (from 2013 onwards). The choice of having a town, i.e., a material object, at the centre of victimhood, cancelled the gendered discourse typical of affective elements of the (ethno)nationalist narratives of feminising the nation (Yuval-Davis, 1997).

Representation of Women

In general, particular experiences, if not related to the military deeds and heroic defence of the town, are silenced, as they do not act as an object for social and collective mourning. Silencing or limiting the agency of women in war commemorations either erases them from the narrative or assigns them a socially acceptable and expected role.

An example of such practice was the 2016 commemoration, where former President of Croatia Kolinda Grabar-Kitarović was joined by the "girl in a blue coat", Željka Jurić, and Jurić's daughter.[10] One of the most emblematic footages during the 1991 siege of Vukovar was the scene of a crying girl in a blue coat leaving the town in a refugee column. Twenty-five years later, she was carrying the same coat together with her daughter, not only underlying a transgenerational transmission of

[10] https://www.novilist.hr/novosti/hrvatska/predsjednica-u-vukovaru-kolinda-grabar-kitarovic-s-djevojcicom-u-plavom-kaputicu/

trauma, but contributing to the process of generating "chosen trauma" on a wider national level, i.e. trauma "linked to the past generation's inability to mourn losses after experiencing a shared traumatic event" (Volkan, 1997, p. 8). In the case of Vukovar, "chosen trauma", instead of targeting the citizens, i.e. the people, focuses on the material object, i.e. the town. The process of transforming female victims into symbolic icons and heroines, in this case, thus functions as a conservative and not as a progressive image, representing a passive symbol of suffering. Hence, notwithstanding the number and the presence of female figures during the commemoration practice in Vukovar, memorialisation follows the pattern of marginalising women as active agents who perform a multitude of roles. Hegemonic discourse and dominant masculinity were therefore even more accentuated with the presence of a female president and her female company. As the Gramscian origins of the term "hegemony" suggest (see Gramsci, 1971), hegemonic masculinity dominates not through force but through consent. In other words, the majority of men (and women) respect and value this way of being a man, even if the majority of men do not enact it.

Those representations, and their affective potential, are subsequently used to legitimize selected (official) narratives and memorial practices. So, which social roles are performed by women? Broadly speaking, the figures of a mother and, to a certain extent, that of a widow remain the most dominant ones in war remembrance; therefore, Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina are not exceptions. Confirmation of such practice is institutionalised in various victims' associations and non-governmental organisations. Those women's social benefits[11] are generally stemming from their deceased male family members' status, which has been largely discussed in the past (Stubbs and Zrinščak, 2009). Accordingly, their social role and agency are limited and determined only through the profile of male figures associated to the women in question, leaving no room for development of their own identitarian categories. The families of war veterans, either disabled, missing, or killed, enjoy one of the most generous sets of social measures, whereas those of the civilian victims of war could only apply for retributive provisions via judicial processes by filing a complaint against the Republic of Croatia.

Alternative Memories

However, not all the blind spots are filled in or brought to mainstream attention. Those points of contention are places where contested memories are created, and consequently commemorated separately.

The debate in wider society regarding, e.g., the fate of missing persons or minority rights act has had a visible impact on commemoration, whether through the

[11] The benefits were exclusively financial (housing and monthly pension), while the psychological assistance was provided only to those who actively took part in the war.

existence of alternative mnemonic practices or the selection of special envoys and participants joining the front of the Column of Remembrance. There are still a couple of pressing questions regarding the fate of Vukovar inhabitants: on one hand, the Serbian minority asks for judicial response in the matter of civilian victims killed from pre-war clashes in the spring of 1991 until the fall of the town, while the unresolved destiny of missing persons of the Croatian majority resulted in some negative attitudes towards the official commemoration.

Representatives of the Serbian minority from Vukovar commemorate civilian victims of their own ethnicity outside of the official program of the Remembrance Day by placing wreaths into the Danube River. The absence of a physical memorial, as well as the refusal to participate in the official commemoration and/or to use existing monuments with other members of the Vukovar community, accentuated the boundaries between the two groups long after the 1995 to 1998 process of peaceful reintegration. However, when the representatives of the Serbian National Council (SNV) joined the Column of Remembrance for the first time in 2013, this move was shadowed by the already described incident between anti-Cyrillic protesters and state-organised protocol.[12]

The hegemonic consensus regarding civilian victims has moved from the *status quo* after more than 25 years; i.e., only in July 2021 a judicial framework dealing with civilian victims and their rights has been adopted.[13] Such a state of affairs is particularly affecting women, especially those who suffered some sort of violence themselves, *in primis* sexual violence.

The fate of missing persons is mainly addressed during an alternative commemorative event where women and women's organisations act as memory entrepreneurs. One day after the official commemoration, on 19 November, a memorial service is organised by the Association of Victims' Parents and Family Members "Vukovar Mothers" (*Udruga roditelja i obitelji zarobljenih i nasilno odvedenih hrvatskih branitelja 'Vukovarske majke'*) at the premises of Borovo Commerce. Under the slogan "Victim of Borovo naselje for the Homeland", this event focuses mainly on the fate of the missing persons. Even though the representatives of political elites and ruling parties sometimes attend the commemoration, no official call is sent out to the institutions. In addition, regional anti-war associations such as Documenta, Humanitarian Law Centre (HLC) or Women in Black (all led by female directors) attend the commemoration and lay wreaths for victims. The prominence of the anti-war associations is mostly a result of their determined and persistent policy of condemning war crimes independently from the nationality or ethnicity of the

[12] https://branitelji.gov.hr/vijesti/dan-sjecanja-na-zrtvu-vukovara/250

[13] https://narodne-novine.nn.hr/clanci/sluzbeni/2021_07_84_1555.html

perpetrator, thus triggering negative reactions from their own co-nationals. Moreover, said organisations acted on numerous occasions as civil party or observers in war crime trials, for example the HLC in the case of Ovčara trial at the Belgrade Special Court for war crimes committed in Vukovar.[14] Here, what would be a stereotypical depiction of a female peacemaker, on the contrary, becomes a figure of traitress in their local communities, because they directly challenge their own country's historical narratives about the difficult past.[15]

Political speeches that are followed by the cultural program of the commemoration in Borovo *de facto* produce a discourse used to legitimate and de-legitimate certain narratives, as well as "individual and group memories, whose results may appear consensual when they are in fact the product of intense contest [...]" (Gillis, 1994, p. 5). However, this commemoration should not be understood as directly opposing memorial practice in conflict with the official one. Rather, it is the dimension of multi-directional memory (Rothberg, 2009) that reflects the multitude of memory entrepreneurs (Jelin, 2003), all with different aims and priorities, and all interpreting the same event through diverse lenses.

Historical Background and Legacy of the Srebrenica Genocide

Widespread massacres in Srebrenica have come to emblemize the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina, when the Army of Republika Srpska, led by General Ratko Mladić and backed by the Army of Yugoslavia and various paramilitary units, took control of the town and killed more than 8,000 Bosniaks, mainly men and boys, in just a week. Srebrenica "has become synonymous with what is considered the worst atrocity in Europe after 1945" (Duijzings, 2007, p. 141), consequently becoming "the key through which the wars of the 1990s are understood" (Gordy, 2013).

The judicial mechanisms of transitional justice, both national and international, have focused intensively on the Srebrenica massacre, convicting military and political leaders for the crime of genocide. The ICTY established that the crimes were motivated by the expansionist attacks of the Serbian army. Mass execution sites were described and it has been recalled that there are still no memorial signs, although there is a memorial "in honor of the... Serbian heroes who died for the Serbian cause"[16] in front of Pilica Dom.

[14] https://docplayer.rs/152287729-U%C4%8De%C5%A1%C4%87e-fonda-za-humanitarno-pravo-u-procesuiranju-ratnih-zlo%C4%8Dina-u-srbiji-april-u%C4%8De%C5%A1%C4%87e-fonda-za-humanitarno-pravo-u-procesuiranju-ratnih-zlo%C4%8Dina.html

[15] https://www.b92.net/info/vesti/index.php?yyyy=2018&mm=02&dd=02&nav_category=640&nav_id=1354301

[16] *Ibid*.

The Srebrenica-Potočari Memorial Center and Cemetery for the Victims of the 1995 Genocide was instituted in 2002, with the OHR's decision (Office of the High Representative) addressing the demands from the victims' families (Bougarel and Helms, 2007; Nettelfield, 2010; Wagner, 2008; Pollack, 2003; Simić, 2009). The political agency of the victims' relatives, *in primis* the commitment of "Mothers of Srebrenica", has firmly put the commemoration on the local BiH, but also on the international, remembrance map. Although the Memorial territorially belongs to the Bosnian Croat entity Federation of BIH, it is however completely landlocked inside of Republika Srpska, the Bosnian Serb entity. Such a reappearance also on the physical level represents, according to Duijzings (2007), a symbolical "undoing" of the ethnic cleansing and genocide.

Nezuk – Potočari Peace March

Among many memorial events related to the 1995 genocide in Srebrenica, the Nezuk to Potočari Peace March stands out as one of the most important bottom-up initiatives. The March is a 100 km long reverse route of the so-called Death March, in which 15000 inhabitants of the safe haven of Srebrenica tried to reach the territory under Bosniak control in July 1995.[17]

The procession, organised since 2005 and counting each year around 5000 participants, runs under the motto "to freedom via the route of death" (*trasom smrti do slobode*) and is organized by a group of advocates, survivors of the Death March, and relatives of the genocide victims. This physically demanding three-day walk is logistically very well supported, and has also found its place in the BiH media.

Actors and Agency

The purpose of the Peace March is, according to its organisational committee, a *protest* aiming "for [a] faster arrest and prosecution of [the] persons responsible for [the] crimes committed".[18] In addition to paying respect to the genocide victims, the Peace March mentions the Army of BiH members and focuses predominantly on fallen soldiers and survivors of the Death March. This is underlined also by the choice of flags carried in the front rows of the March: whereas the majority are those of present-day BiH, there is also a significant number of army units' flags. In addition, old BiH flags that were in use from 1992 to 1998 strengthen the importance of the country's independence and positionality during the war. Survivors are

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

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

actively engaged in memory transmission, as they tell their own personal memories to the other participants. The authentic surroundings and the embodiment of the route, together with the testimonies, facilitates the flow of the communicative memory connecting both physical and symbolic dimensions. "Reversal" of memory, of the conditions, of the main actors (or at least the lack of agency of the group in focus) allows the inclusion of the "audience", who then becomes an active participant, i.e., medium of memory. Such situations definitely motivate/appeal to those joining the March: external in nature, but pro-active in keeping the memory alive.

Again, double identification – military/soldiers and civilian/victims – is what puts this mnemonic activity in the focus of the research. Moreover, this practice is one of the rare grassroots initiatives in Srebrenica that was not organised by female agents of memory. The consequences of the genocide, in which a substantial percentage of the town's male population was killed, made women not only survivors, but also the most important mnemonic actors.

At the Peace March, the female presence in the audience is nevertheless significant. Representatives of women's associations such as "Mothers of Srebrenica" are attending the March, however without taking an active role in the transmission of memory. Most of the older local participants are visible also because of the lack of (expensive) mountaineering equipment (such as trekking shoes or waterproof jackets): for them, joining the March is above all an emotional necessity. At the final kilometre of the March bereaved family members are invited to step in front of the procession, leading the way together with the survivors into the Memorial Centre in Potočari. As in the case of Vukovar, the social role that fits in the hegemonic discourse, i.e. that of a mother or a widow, is given visibility. Nevertheless, this act can be understood also as a transfer of agency, as the female actors are the most active memory entrepreneurs in the framework of politics of memory. Their symbolic power is resituated in the proximity of the Memorial Cemetery and within the official remembrance program.

Representation of the Past – Emotions and Gender

The Death March is framed in such a way that it is not represented as a result of a defeat, even though it underlines military experience as a cohesive and determinate characteristic of the event. However, failure is evoked on many levels and in different situations: failure of the Dutch UN forces to prevent the massacre, failure of the international criminal justice to prosecute individuals responsible for the genocide, but also failure of the survivors to remember/keep their own memories intact. The ambush and subsequent clashes with the much more numerous and better equipped VRS army are represented as an act of sacrifice, of inevitable martyrdom. Unlike the Vukovar commemoration, where *de facto* military defeat was framed as a he-

roic act, in Srebrenica the victimhood narrative incorporates all aspects of the events culminating in the crime of genocide. The survivors' narratives omit any account on military battle or fighting, or even resistance. Time and memory are becoming slow and diluted, almost inert, representing well the suffocating summer days of mid-July 1995. What was often described are the absences – of air, of a cool breeze, of food, even of sounds. Silence of the mountains and empty landscapes in the survivors' description is not disturbed by screams or artillery shots. Sporadic sensorial flashes are inscribed into their memories, fragmented from the entire picture of the event.

In contrast, one part of the Peace March program – so-called "history lessons" (*historijski čas*) – offered personal and artistic understanding of the 1995 genocide. Apart from being a powerful field of political propaganda during wars or in times of political crises, culture can also serve as the key battlefield at which conflicting narratives about the past clash in the aftermath of conflicts. Therefore, the past events are interpreted/demythologized and/or criticised in the cultural sphere, aiming to provoke affective reactions among the public. The mixture of the factual narration and the literary expressions enhances the individual, authentic experience with the emotional response to lived trauma. It offers the participants of the March a perspective that is obscured and neglected during the official commemorative practice.

The repetitiveness in the program, and the insistence on specific performative elements, has an amplified effect on the audience. Such is the case with the live interpretation of "Srebrenica Inferno", sung by the girls' choir from Potočari primary school:

Majko, majko, još te sanjam	*Mother, mother, I still dream of you*
Sestro, brate, još vas sanjam svake noći	*Sister, brother, I still dream about you every night*
Nema vas, nema vas, nema vas	*You're not here...*
Tražim vas, tražim vas, tražim vas	*I'm searching for you...*
Gdje god krenem vidim vas	*Wherever I go, I see you*
Majko, oče, što vas nema	*Mother, father, why are you not here*
Bosno moja, ti si moja mati	*My Bosnia, you are my mother*
Bosno moja, majkom ću te zvati	*My Bosnia, I will call you mother*
Bosno majko,	*Bosnia, mother,*
Srebrenice sestro	*Srebrenica, sister,*
Neću biti sam	*I won't be alone*

The text of the composition evokes stereotyped comparisons of the country/nation with mother and Srebrenica with sister. With very few words it depicts the story of lost family members and the emptiness that remains after their disappearance. Despite the lyrics being written in the male singular "I" form ("*neću biti sam*"), the song is sung by a girls' choir. Members of the choir are dressed in white robes, as a result of the decision to have children's voices turn this performance into an angelic "out of

this world" experience. Female interventions outside of the staged program are rare and do not include local actors (an American female professor regularly attending the March gave a speech about her experience of the commemorative event), underlying women as "external" factors to the commemoration. However, women account for a large portion of March participants and their presence is not one of invisible passers-by. Hence, even though the event that is being commemorated/re-enacted is lacking women's voices, the quest for an authentic experience and desire to pay respect to the victims through physical effort are inclusive for all genders.

Other Mnemonic Practices Related to the Srebrenica Genocide

The majority of other mnemonic practices in Srebrenica are strongly related to the agency of female groups and associations like "Mothers of Srebrenica", with the visit to the sites of killings being the most prominent one. This event is staged one day after the funeral service at the Memorial Centre, and is guided and organised by the "Mothers of Srebrenica" organisation; the aim is to pay respect to the memory of the fallen, but also advocate for proper memorialisation and marking of such sites.

Conclusion

By presenting two different mnemonic practices related to some of the most salient episodes of the 1990s wars in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Croatia, this paper analysed the social production of gender in the course of the Vukovar and Srebrenica commemorations. Memory entrepreneurs, i.e. social actors, are analysed together with the agency they are implying in the organisation and implementation of the commemoration. The dominant figure in both commemoration rituals, i.e. the actor accounting for most agency, is male, either soldier or victim, while females are represented as victims predominantly connected to male figures, either as mothers or widows or members of bereaved families. As "one must always remember that those conventionally at the centre of analysis are not there naturally" (Zalewski, 1995, p. 354), the way the audience is negotiating its own positionality and affective attachment in order to take part in the mnemonic practice gets more salient.

The members of women's organisations, despite being present, deliberately take a more passive role of participant observant to underline the role of the male survivors who escaped the town, and consequently the genocide. The silence plays a decisive role in the gendered narratives of both Vukovar and Srebrenica. On one hand, in Vukovar, there is a complete lack of spoken words except for the religious service at the very end of the commemoration. The case of the Peace March, on the contrary, breaks the silence in every possible way by offering personal memories and individual life stories of those involved in the Death March. In both events the official narratives are absent, making room for selection and interpretation of the past.

Consequently, although coming from different strategies, the outcome of both commemorative events favours the inclusion of heterogeneous audiences, transmission of authentic experience and facilitation of the role of communicative memory. While the male dominant version of history is present in both cases, it is the introduction and subsequent prioritisation of the material site of memory that de-individualised the mnemonic narrative. Consequently, the affective memory is transferred from human victims to a symbolic level of the town-victim, making it equally appealing for heterogeneous groups of commemoration participants. Both Vukovar and Srebrenica with their museums, monuments, and memorials, that is "emblematic sites of representation", communicate notions of masculinity and femininity, entangling thus in that way gender and nation (McDowell, 2008, p. 336). Construction of the master narrative of both war and post-war realities is highly related to gendered stories and takes part in broader affective politics of memory and nationalism.

The underrepresentation of gender in conflict narratives is in sharp opposition to the constitution of audience during commemorative practice. I argue that such disruption is possible due to the social and cultural processes of symbolic development of Vukovar and Srebrenica as *lieux de mémoire*. Collective memory therefore acts "as a connector between the physical and the social", transforming the material objects into "carriers of memory" (Ljubojevic, 2021; Ljubojevic, Jerman and Bovan, 2017).

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