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Ćatović Hughes, Selma; Tanović, S.

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Liminal Spaces of Memory and Remembrance: Realignment of Agonistic Interpretations at Sites of Complex Histories in Sarajevo

Selma Ćatović Hughes and Sabina Tanović

Death is transformed into a new life. Fighters gave their lives so that those who remained and those who are coming can live in better, more meaningful ways.

DOBROVIĆ 1966, 6



Abstract

This chapter explores two challenging heritage sites in Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina: the Vraca Memorial Park and the Azići-Otes battlefield. The Vraca Memorial Park is a Yugoslav memorial site dedicated to the 11,000 people who died during Axis terror in the Second World War. However, it was later used as a platform for violence during the 1990s war, making it a site of contention and liminality between the park's historical significance and its complicated socio-political context. The Azići-Otes battlefield was a crucial place of resistance during the 1992–1996 Siege of Sarajevo, where all three ethnic groups fought in a small area, rendering it a complex and highly important strategic point in the defence of Sarajevo. Today, however, the once significant site has been forgotten and unmarked, with no trace that it was once an important location during the city's collective resistance.

This chapter aims to shed light on how memories of these disputed territories intermingle by looking at official historical narratives and individual experiences and memories. The chapter uses an autoethnographic approach, contextualising the Azići-Otes site as a place embedded in personal family narratives and a series of somatographic sediments of traces. The collection of narrative accounts, sourced independently as oral testimonies and through the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia archives of witness statements, provide insights into a fragmented collective memory

and the persistent development of altered narratives over the past thirty years. These individual memory retrievals begin to unpack and reconstruct composites of carefully orchestrated narratives suited for political frameworks, as well as challenge competing agendas for national remembrance and post-conflict identity. The chapter also explores the Vraca Memorial Park through the analysis of conceptual design proposals and civilian activism that call for a restoration of significance and re-activation of Vraca as both a public space and space of remembrance. These sites serve as fruitful examples for understanding disputed territories in the contemporary Balkans.

Keywords

collective memory – conceptual design – culture of remembrance difficult – heritage – memorial site

1 Introduction

In the Oscar-winning film *No Man's Land* (2001), a Serbian and a Bosnian soldier are trapped between the frontlines of the opposing armies, in a trench positioned in no man's land. Although awkward, the situation is not tragic until the two soldiers discover another Bosnian soldier, presumed dead but who then gains consciousness while lying on an unexploded mine. The slow progression of the film's plot hints at a potential for development of an agonistic forum between the protagonists, which opens with the question 'who started the war?', asked by whichever soldier is in possession of a gun. While this discussion is acted out relying on humor, this scene in the movie is critical in terms of relativisation of history and clarity of historical facts – contrary to the cinematic storyline, there is no confusion about who started the aggression on Bosnia and Herzegovina. Further into the movie plot, United Nations (UN) peacekeeping units were forced into action by a journalist who suspected the UN's indifference to act even in emergency situations. Similarly, Joe Sacco's non-fiction graphic novel *The Fixer: A Story from Sarajevo* (2003) opens up the complexity of 'the great Siege of Sarajevo' from within, as the narrative focuses on 'war within the war' wherein the main protagonists are local criminals profiting from war and dubious government decisions. Both examples end with a moot prospect for an agonistic space of living, either among the hostile ethnic parties or within the international community with its failure to successfully resolve the issue.

Using an autoethnographic approach and historical research, we delve deeper into the specificities of the context by analysing two sites embedded in Sarajevo's urban tissue as liminal spaces of memory. The first case study, Vraca Memorial Park, is a historical site officially dedicated to remembering the Second World War while inadvertently commemorating other historical periods, namely Austro-Hungarian rule and the infamous siege of Sarajevo (1992–96). The second case study, focusing on the neighbourhoods of Otes and Azići, explores a strategically important site of resistance against mechanisms of occupation installed on the hills surrounding Sarajevo during the siege. While these two sites have rather different histories, they invite attention precisely because they are bound by the siege which rendered them as liminal war heritage narrating the stories of both sides of the conflict: oppressor and oppressed. Approaching these two sites through historical analysis and explorative art intervention, relying on both the archives of the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia (ICTY) and author Ćatović Hughes' personal remembrance as integral to transforming the fragmented past into intergenerational sustainable sites of memory, we search for ways that can impact social innovation at polysemic war heritage sites. Through an autoethnographic lens, thirty years since the end of the siege, we ask whether our memory has all but completely dissolved amid conflicting reports, decades of political stalemate and readjusted narratives, where the aggressor is gaining ground to be perceived as an equal victim as a result of collateral damage from the war. How do we test personal boundaries and push our limits as human beings to recall, in public space, memories we all would rather forget, in the hope of inspiring new perspectives for agonistic treatments of difficult heritage sites?

Researching the specificities of remembering processes in relation to atrocities since the Second World War, including the genocides in Cambodia, Rwanda and Bosnia and Herzegovina, scholars argue that 'the pliability of memory is actually its greatest asset' (Whigham 2017, 68). They emphasise that sites of memory act as palimpsests of time, space and history, embodying and revealing an aggregate of fractured individual and collective experiences, official and informal storytelling, intended to provide a more dialogue-driven platform and prevent the antagonistic framework of the past from reoccurring. These sites facilitate agonistic interventions to disclose and embrace layers of difficult histories. The ability to 'demonstrate the interplay between myth, history, memory, and liminality' (Laidler 2016, 6) can be strategic, articulating transformative dialogue in regard to established cultural identities and complex political systems. Aleida Assmann argues that in order to build a collaborative future we need to re-engage with our past. She emphasises intergenerational dynamics reinforced by 'the closing or opening of historical archives' as an

important transformative factor; as she argues, 'if sources are made publicly accessible and are recognised in a public discourse, this can have a profound effect on a national memory' (Assmann 2015, 201). This is precisely what *Forgotten Battlefield*, the art intervention at the Azići and Otes sites, is about.

The concept of liminality – as conceived by Arnold van Gennep in the early 1900s and later developed by Victor Turner in the 1960s – is useful here as a specific lens to analyse social and political conditions and to illustrate those that are 'characterized by the dislocation of established structures ... and uncertainty about the future outcomes' (Horvath et al. 2015, 2). Sediments of contested history, with lingering remnants of post-conflict trauma in combination with the instabilities of the present, build up liminal landscapes and trap layers of the past into a complex and immanent juxtaposition. The spatial experientiality of sites of memory throughout Sarajevo, as the city itself was extensively the site of severe trauma and occupation, suggests more voids and division than conscious attempts for cohesive collective memory: outlining liminality within the urban coexistence narrative. The liminal spaces of remembrance discussed in this chapter carry a certain potential for agonistic remembrances precisely because they exist at the tangible and intangible borders of different entities (Vraca Memorial Park) and in urban micro-contexts (Azići-Otes). By looking at how unofficial remembrance is demonstrated at these two sites through practices that engage between local and global, we aim to reinforce a notion set forth by Cole, who argues that 'activist curating engenders a precarious yet sustained practice of political and social possibility that produces lively spaces of community beyond ruination' (2022, 16). Similarly, Cento Bull and Clarke stress that while 'single agonistic interventions around monuments can challenge and partially deconstruct the hegemonic memory regime', they are not sufficient to achieve 'radical multiperspectivism or in-depth reflection upon the constructed nature of established identities', which can only be achieved through 'complex, multilayered, and sustained socio-cultural practices' (2021, 204). With this in mind, we propose to explore how Vraca Memorial Park and the Azići-Otes site of remembrance can be imagined as liminal spaces for a more sustained agonistic practice in the future, by approaching them as sites of dynamic socio-cultural changes and context-specific meaning-making.

2 Complexity of the Context

The Dayton Peace Agreement signed in December 1995 established Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) as a state with three constituent peoples (Bosniak, Croat

and Serb) across two entities: the Federation of BiH, with a majority Bosniak and Croat population, and the Republika Srpska (RS), with a majority Serb population. Three decades later, and two decades since *No Man's Land* and *The Fixer*, present-day Sarajevo is dotted with monuments and memorials marking important battlefields, distinguished military heroes, civilian massacres and individual tragedies. The web of official physical memorials is constantly growing, as every municipality in Sarajevo has a number of past, current and planned memorial projects. Memorials installed in the city commonly are centred around lists of names of soldiers, whereas battlefield memorials such as Žuč are growing into whole complexes with grand sculptural centrepieces. On the other hand, some of the most important locations in the city, such as Pofalići and Azići-Otes, that were crucial for the defence against the aggressor's terror are still unmarked. In RS, equally dynamic building activities in public spaces can be observed. Since the number of casualties and civilian war tragedies in RS is incomparably lower than in the Federation of BiH, some of the monuments and memorials in RS have a primary role of reinforcing antagonisms existing since the Ottoman Empire, foregrounding centuries-old identity animosity among various ethnicities.

It was, however, the post-First World War political landscape that generated intricate territorial configurations in nation-building efforts throughout Europe. In the Balkans, the political reconfiguration brought together diverse ethnic groups, as remnants of former empires, into new countries (Wachtel 1998; Andersen 2016). Furthermore, resistance movements during the Second World War, in combination with an aggregation of violence among occupying forces and their collaborators, were instrumental in undertaking and directing postwar memory in the former Yugoslavia. Simultaneously, simmering nationalist identities grew within different temporalities and historicisations stemming from different narrative perspectives, resulting in various commonplace, timeworn and enduring representations (Abazi and Doja 2016).

During the Second World War Yugoslavia was occupied by Axis forces. They met a strong Yugoslav resistance movement, led by Josip Broz Tito, who came to power following the alignment of the partisans and the Allied forces. Bosnia and Herzegovina was part of the Independent State of Croatia (NDH), led by the infamous Croatian nationalist-extremist movement Ustaša and its fascist regime. The first session of the State Anti-fascist Council for the National Liberation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (ZAVNOBiH), on 25 November 1943, established the ground for a new, federal Yugoslavia (Palmberger 2008). Generally speaking, Tito's approach to numerous unresolved tensions from the war was through 'brotherhood and unity', a policy which promoted peaceful

coexistence among groups.¹ The official narrative of the Second World War became that of a ‘national liberation war’ or ‘people’s liberation war’: a socialist revolution against fascism that was fought by the partisans and supported by all Yugoslav nations (Djokić 2002).

With its undoubted significance in constructing the public life of the new nation, architecture played a vital background role and had a significant impact on how Socialist Yugoslavia was perceived by both allies and foes abroad. In particular, the so-called *spomeniks* (monuments, in Bosnian) went beyond the confines of local contexts and created intricate non-figural surroundings that challenged the traditional distinctions between sculpture, landscape architecture and architecture (Kulić and Mrduljaš 2012). Sarajevo’s Vraca Memorial Park, inaugurated in 1981, was one such project. At that time, however, nationalist movements began to mobilise old tensions based on distrust among seemingly peacefully coexisting ethnic groups (Palmberger 2008).² This spiralled into the 1990s wars of secession, in which symbolic heritage of a heterogeneous past was targeted purposefully for destruction (Coward 2009).

In early 1992, Sarajevo came under siege by Bosnian Serb forces that were supported by the Yugoslav National Army. The siege continued even after the Dayton Peace Agreement was signed in Paris in December 1995. It was only by the end of February 1996 that the Serb forces left areas of Sarajevo (such as neighbourhoods adjacent to the Vraca Memorial Park) held under their control and thereby officially ended what is today recognised as the longest siege of a city in modern history.³ During the siege, Vraca Memorial Park was occu-

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- 1 Since the collapse of the Ottoman and Habsburg empires, a series of new multiethnic countries were created in the Balkan region, including the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes; a short-lived fascist and Nazi-aligned Independent State of Croatia (NDH); and ultimately the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, which persisted and withstood until the early 1990s, culminating in cataclysmic hostilities.
 - 2 The heroic ‘anti-fascism’ of the early postwar days was, by the end of the 1960s, diverging into memory conflicts throughout Europe. When the idea to build the memorial park was initiated in the early 1960s, socialist internationalism was changing as well, leaving behind the victims of the war and a canonical idea of resistance. The early contribution of the left as an opposition movement to Axis terror was subsiding. By the time the memorial park was finally built, almost two decades later and a year after Tito’s death, the tensions that would lead to the traumatic break-up of Yugoslavia had been reinforced.
 - 3 The siege lasted 1,425 days, making it the longest siege in modern history, with more than 11,000 people killed. Many of the city’s most important cultural institutions, historical monuments, sporting venues and wider social and economic infrastructure were destroyed or seriously damaged. Ordinary citizens, already suffering the privations caused by the cutting off of gas, electricity and water supplies, were not only caught in the crossfire but deliberately targeted by shell and sniper fire (Lowe and Morrison 2021).

pied by Bosnian Serb forces that terrorised citizens with snipers and artillery and, subsequently, inflicted great damage to the park's structure upon their retreat (CPNM 2005). The Vraca site was situated at the outer boundary of the besieged area. However, some ten kilometres further from the city centre (demonstrating how the permeability of the frontline altered) there was an important site of resistance to the siege aggression: the neighbourhoods of Otes and Azići, where all three ethnic groups fought in a relatively small area, rendering it a complex and highly important strategic point in the defence project. Most of the fluctuation of the overall siege, along a frontline encircling the city for some 65 kilometres, occurred between late 1992 and early 1993. Influenced by various strategic and political factors – both locally, in and around Sarajevo, as well as beyond, at other battlefields in Bosnia and Herzegovina – the siege of Sarajevo became a stagnant line in 1993.

After the war, Vraca Memorial Park fell into disrepair, with its material legacy bound up with the traumatic memory of the siege. The battlefield of Otes and Azići was forgotten, in the sense that (like Vraca) the site was not included in the framework of official post-siege remembrance. The so-called 'third landscape' that has emerged at Vraca due to its untouched nature over the course of three decades clearly demonstrates this: 'there is no room in the ethnonationalists' cramped narratives for shared suffering', which leads to the past represented by the memorial site being 'exiled to the wilderness, both literally and figuratively' (Dougherty 2019, 258). The neighbourhoods of Otes and Azići, conversely, saw a different kind of transformation: from semi-rural outskirts to more suburban living, with expansive new housing and retail developments. There has been a complete erasure of any physical evidence of the siege and the western boundary of the 1992–96 frontlines. The fields saturated with the blood and bravery of the young and under-armed BiH army lay forgotten and unmarked, remaining only as fragmented memories of the survivors and those searching for more answers about their lost ones.

While antagonistic remembrance (framed by the complexity of the 30-year-long post-siege status quo) is commonplace in BiH, a possibility of agonistic remembrance remains an underexplored concept. This is partially explained in Ferrándiz and Hristova's (2021) investigation into the production of memory modes at mass grave exhumation locations as sites of 'potential agonistic fora'⁴: they argue that 'forensics should be seen as the art of the forum', with a purpose of 'unit[ing] the possibilities for contextualising a historical event through evidence, with the attraction of opposite voices potentially opening

4 The word 'forensic' derives etymologically from 'forum'.

up to a radical form of multiperspectivity, including both victims and perpetrators of the crimes' (Ferrándiz and Hristova 2021, 62–63).

3 The Nature of Vraca: Gates to Palimpsests of Intertwined Histories and a More Liveable Future?

Free-roaming goats eating dried-out commemorative wreaths laid to remember resistance fighters and civilians killed during the Second World War by the fascist terror of the Axis forces and their puppet state NDH: this is a scene that the rare visitors to Vraca Memorial Park will encounter if they visit after the symbolic wreath-laying commemorations on important dates. The encounter will, perhaps, make the contrast between Vraca and the city even more obvious, as the busy urbanity of Sarajevo ceases to exist at Vraca, in spite of its close proximity. From here, the city can be observed in peace, in the company of the goats and a random passer-by. Over its 130-year history as a man-made place, Vraca has undergone five distinct periods. During the Austro-Hungarian period, a fortress was built by colonial authorities on the northern slopes of Trebević mountain, as part of a military control system around the city. The fortress served as one of several fortifications to control Sarajevo. Then, during the Second World War, Sarajevo became part of the NDH, and the Vraca fortress was turned into an official execution site, where citizens of Sarajevo were killed while others were deported to Nazi camps throughout Europe. During the Yugoslav era, Vraca Memorial Park was conceptualised (1960s) and built (1980s), as a place synonymous with the resistance of citizens against fascism, while the fortress was repurposed to serve as a museum (Figure 4.1).⁵ During the 1992–96 siege, the park was seized by RS nationalist forces. It became a strategic location from which the city of Sarajevo was targeted by heavy artillery and snipers.⁶ After the siege, in the post-Dayton era, the memorial site was divided between two ethnic entities, RS and BiH. Despite

5 In the decade leading up to the notorious siege of Sarajevo, the newly established memorial park in Sarajevo thrived as a popular space for remembrance. It hosted organised educational excursions for Tito's *pioniri* and served as a beloved public venue for recreational activities. Set against the backdrop of a magnificent view of the city, the park also featured the Austro-Hungarian fortress, repurposed as a museum dedicated to the anti-fascist resistance.

6 Tragically, during and immediately following the siege, the memorial complex suffered partial destruction as a deliberate act of urbicide orchestrated by the occupying forces of the Bosnian Serb Army. The urbicide of the city during the siege is documented in the Warchitecture project, but Vraca is excluded from its records as the area was under the control of



FIGURE 4.1 Vraca Memorial Park, Sarajevo

© SELMA ĆATOVIĆ HUGHES AND SABINA TANOVIĆ

being declared a national monument in 2005, vandalism in the park persisted, and the fortress, already extensively damaged, continued to decay. At the same time, like numerous other socialist monuments and memorial sites, Vraca was appropriated by ethnonational elites that use domestication of selected events from the national past to advocate for their specific political agendas (Finney 2010).

While there have been official efforts (from both the city of Sarajevo and the eastern or ‘Serbian’ Sarajevo) to clean up debris and rubbish at Vraca, the overall neglect is an obvious indicator of the context stuck in limbo. Antagonistic actions – exemplified by the 2014 installation, on the ‘Serbian’ (RS) side, of a memorial board dedicated to Ratko Mladić (military leader of the Army of Republika Srpska and convicted war criminal mastermind behind the Srebrenica genocide), along with subsequent destructions and reinstallations – transform Vraca into an active battleground for memory wars and remembrance. In their appropriation of Vraca, Serbian nationalists rely on Serbian names listed on Vraca memorial walls but eschew their anti-fascist orientation. In 2021 an initiative to add a new memorial wing to Vraca, on the side that officially belongs to RS, was announced by a mayor of ‘Serbian’ Sarajevo in Serbia’s daily newspaper *Политика*, stating that the new wing would have three memorials: one for Serbian and Jewish victims of the Second World War,⁷

Serbian forces during the occupation (Čurić 1993). The complete damage of the memorial park was estimated when the park was designated a national monument in 2005.

⁷ The most recent war memory within the three divided ethnonational groups of BiH is also realigned with each group’s memory from the Second World War. For example, Serbs’ identity and victimhood from the Second World War is revived as a dominant narrative in official

a second commemorating all Serbian victims of the 1990s war and a third dedicated to 'Sarajevo street names from which the postwar Sarajevo government eliminated the Serbian specific and replaced it with the names of men who committed crimes against Serbian people' (Stanišić 2021).

While, in heritage terms, this would obviously endanger the national monument, the initiative is even more worrying due to its obvious conflict with the anti-fascist character of the memorial park. In fact, the initiative only demonstrated the pro-fascist inclinations of those who celebrate war criminals. In contrast to the RS initiative, Bosniak politicians – namely from the Party of Democratic Action⁸ who used the Vraca site as a background to their election campaigns during the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020 – approach the site as important anti-fascist heritage and continue to emphasise the importance of preserving and maintaining it as such, albeit with only moderate (that is, necessary) actions towards this goal performed in reality on their behalf. What is more, research shows how the culturocide that started during the siege is perpetuated through the institutional model of post-Dayton Bosnia and Herzegovina, in which responsibilities in the field of culture are not statewide but divided across ten cantons and many local institutions. This intentional division perpetuates the fragmentation of cultural heritage into three ethnic parts – a perfect recipe for cultivating an antagonistic culture of remembrance that results in irretrievable loss of collective valuable heritage (Walasek 2015; Kučukalić 2018).

Apart from the doom of the political arena, however, the last decade has seen more interest in a collective appropriation of Vraca Memorial Park. For example, in 2016 citizens organised a park cleaning initiative, accompanied by an art action to install a wooden arm on a central Vraca sculpture, entitled *Executions*, after the original bronze arm was stolen by vandals. In 2019, the Reconciliation through Cooperation between Divided Municipalities in BiH project, financially supported by the Council of Europe, was one of the rare examples of collaboration between the two entities: the municipalities of Novo Sarajevo (BiH) and East Novo Sarajevo (RS) joined together in cleaning and landscape maintenance of Vraca, concluding with performances from two primary schools, one from each municipality, and stating that the memorial park represented 'a part of our common history' (Mondo 2019). In addition, over the past few years, there has been more vocal interest among designers and architects

remembrance projects in RS. In contrast, Second World War monuments located in the areas with Croats as a predominant ethnic group have been neglected and even destroyed because Yugoslavia is seen as the period of Serbian predominance.

8 Stranka Demokratske Akcije (SDA) is a Bosniak nationalist conservative party.

regarding reactivation of Vraca through different design approaches, such as beautification, conservation and extension. For example, the conceptual projects – *Vraca Memorial Park Manifesto: Rebirth* (2018) by Ajla Imamović; *Through Vraca toward New Perspectives* (2021) by Narcisa Bašić-Gaković and Mejrema Zatrić; and *Valter Vraca Forum* (2022) by Dinko Jelečević – all imagine Vraca as common heritage and a successful public space in creating a platform for exploring and learning about the history of the site.

While all three projects deal with the restoration, conservation and revitalisation of Vraca Memorial Park through an adaptive reuse of the memorial complex and the remains of the Austro-Hungarian fortress as a hub for education, socialisation and musealisation, only the *Through Vraca toward New Perspectives* project extends the focus of ‘heritage’ from the man-made architecture towards the surrounding ‘new’ nature that has emerged organically over the past three decades. The project aims to restore the historical and design values of the original conceptual idea while giving landscape solutions that envision future practices and explore the potential of nature in public spaces. As the designers explain, the original intention of Vraca Memorial Park’s 1960s design team was to respect the indigenous flora of Trebević mountain (primary landscape) while introducing new species to serve as decoration and to amplify the park’s narrative (secondary landscape) – for example, the terraced ascent toward the *Executions* sculpture depicting a female figure raising her arms in resistance to fascist terror. The 2021 concept proposal recognised the third landscape – emerging organically from the integration of the primary and secondary landscapes – as the largest potential of the memorial park due to its sensory, tactile and olfactory specificities (Bašić-Gaković and Zatrić 2021). Additionally, it offers solutions to existing spatial challenges, such as the site’s difficult access and demanding maintenance (for example, both the symbolic ‘eternal flame of revolution’ and a fountain, key features of the park, often are switched off) – but it also addresses the ambiguity in reading the memorial’s symbolic language.

This ambiguity is particularly interesting since it touches upon the very essence of the park as a complex memorial space that was conceived by three authors⁹ from different disciplines and crafted through the combination of diverse spatial and aesthetic elements over an expansive stretch of landscape. The scale and interdisciplinarity created a certain dissonance in the architectural composition, which is reflected through the variety of materials used and the arrangement of symbolic elements, as well as their position within the

9 Architect Vladimir Dobrović, sculptor Alija Kućukalić and landscape designer Aleksandar Maltarić.

park. Also, the very meaning of the name *Vraca*, translating as ‘small door’ in Bosnian, Croatian and Serbian languages, can be puzzling for a contemporary visitor, since there are no physical doors whatsoever – only a metaphorical suggestion that one is entering a specific realm, that of ambiguity and, perhaps, nostalgia. The spatial liminality is further reinforced by the symbolic, immaterial layers of the park, which is even more relevant in comprehending the essence of this place. For example, the memorial park is dedicated to people who were murdered during the Second World War, but it inadvertently commemorates those who were killed between 1992 and 1996. This argument is illustrated most poignantly by the fact that Alija Kučukalić, a renowned sculptor and creator of the *Executions* sculpture, was murdered in 1992 by Serbian and Bosnian Serb artillery (possibly launched from the occupied *Vraca* neighbourhood) on his way to teach at the Academy of Fine Arts during the siege of Sarajevo. In this light, the *Executions* sculpture pays symbolic homage not only to the victims from the Second World War but also the victims of the siege (Kučukalić 2018). Inscribing this layer of history into the existing tissue of the memorial park by, for example, adding a memorial to the victims of the siege, however, would most likely only elevate existing antagonisms and prompt RS to actually build a tripartite memorial, as announced in 2021. Therefore, the ambiguity and liminality of present-day *Vraca* can also be interpreted as its potential – a status quo worth maintaining for a while.

Although the tragedy of the artist’s death, as well as the postwar obliteration of his work, brings to mind *No Man’s Land’s* abandoned Bosnian soldier, lying on an unexploded mine and awaiting a likely tragic fate, the memorial park, as a space for both perpetrators and victims, in its cryptic symbolism, offers a buffer zone between everyday antagonisms. With its ambiguous spatial architecture and third landscape, it can potentially encourage the exploration of contested memories of the past, promote learning and critical thinking, and facilitate ongoing cultural exchange, in order to advance social reconstruction and retain a significance for generations growing up in an extremely antagonistic society. Memory narratives are both embedded and embodied here. The relationship between narratives and memories ideally facilitates a process of ongoing interpretation that should be malleable, kaleidoscopic and discursive to establish new value relationships with the past – an aim that is shared with what has been recognised as the post-Yugoslav meta-museum turn (Jagdhuhn 2022). Grassroots events, as well as official ones, centred around (for example) the third landscape and the natural evolution/decomposition of the site, can be tools for agonising *Vraca* as an arena for different perspectives. Juxtaposed between the past and the present, the multigenerational retrieval and reconstruction of complex history can serve as a tool to question, examine

and realign perceptions into a multiplex collection of individual and collective narratives.

4 Somatography of Memory Sediments

Nestled in the valley traversed by the Miljacka river, Sarajevo's main circulation conduit stretches along an east-west axis, with the secondary roads and bridges connecting the north and south sides of the city. The western outskirts – spilling over a fertile plain flanked by multiple rivers (Miljacka, Bosna and Željeznica), framed by mountains in distant periphery and intersected by a web of railway tracks – bear traces of Neolithic culture, Roman settlements and establishments of the medieval state Vrhbosna. The earliest formation of a Catholic parish named *Sarajevsko polje* (Sarajevo field) was recorded in 1710 (Draganović, Kristić and Subašić 1941), located in today's neighbourhoods of Stup, Azići, Otes, Bare, Doglodi and Ilidža. With the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, the influx of new inhabitants from the west resulted in the increase of the number of Catholics in the city. With the construction of a new church and a cemetery, and during the years following the Second World War, the parish of Stup continued to attract Catholics, particularly from the southern parts of the country, as a workforce in new factories in Sarajevo (Famos motor manufacturing and Energoinvest engineering company).

Due to the higher concentration of Bosnian Croats (Catholics) in these suburbs of Sarajevo, it was no surprise that, at the beginning of the war in 1992, the western boundary of the siege became a stronghold for the Croatian Defence Council (HVO), abutting the other two ethnic military groups (Army of Republika Srpska and the predominantly Muslim but officially multiethnic BiH army). Owing to its landscape features, the western boundary of the flatlands of Stup, Azići and Otes was 'the most neuralgic point of defence of Sarajevo' (Pejić 2008, 60) because the RS army easily could have rolled in with their heavy artillery. The HVO leaders, therefore, made a strategic decision at the beginning of the siege to defend their zone of responsibility using political means, applying 'pacifistic' relations along the border and developing a collaboration with Bosnian Serbs – an act that the BiH army understood as a betrayal – by having a humanitarian corridor for food and supplies (which were then sold to civilians under siege at exorbitant prices) in exchange for the expensively-priced relocation of residents, mainly Serbs and Croats. This highly profitable business would dissolve by the end of 1992, with the occupation of the territory by the RS army (Pejić 2008). The political, territorial and ethnic gymnastics of approximately 6.5 square kilometres of no man's land,

covering the areas of Azići and Otes in particular, established a battlefield that consumed so many lives at the western frontline of the siege. During the period between December 1992 and early spring 1993, the BiH army and HVO forces suffered great losses in battles in Otes and Azići, resulting in major adjustment of the western frontline: the RS army controlled most of the area, including several strategic landmarks (Karitas Catholic monastery, Čarapara sock factory and Livada, a great open field).

An assembly of fragmented historical evidence and reports (written, visual and oral) – collected from the ICTY archives, the U.S. Library of Congress, and documents of the First Corps of the BiH army, as well as oral witness statements from former BiH army, RS army and HVO soldiers – narrates how Sarajevo's frontline and its siege fluctuated and permeated the surrounding boundary, as well as what strategic plans helped to sustain its perimeter border. Analysing the material acquired from the ICTY archives demonstrates changes to the boundary, the invisible barriers of no man's land and the trenches of the frontline. Furthermore, comparison of satellite images from 2002 to 2022 shows radical change and building development in the Azići-Otes area during the postwar period. What is apparent in this visual analysis is the erasure of any traces of the battlefield, which may be interpreted as a failure to preserve historically significant artefacts and war heritage as potential aid towards reinforcing cultural and collective remembrance.

The seemingly bottomless repository of the ICTY archives – as disputed as they have been – dispenses tools to retrieve, manage and reconstruct fractured memory and has begun to organise a long-drawn-out delivery of verdicts and facile justice for victims. Focusing on the specific area of the frontline, the western part of the siege area and parts of Otes and Azići, the ICTY archives were used to compile military and witness reports specifically describing spatial and geographic characteristics of the Sarajevo battlefield and the siege during the period between 1992 and 1995, the military organization and deployment of forces along the frontlines (by the armies of both BiH and RS), as well as a series of operations executed in and around the city, impacting the borderlines of the siege. The analysis and overlay of verified information indicate that reports and statements from a range of witnesses, all sworn to tell the truth, exhibit significant conflicts and discrepancies, perhaps accurately mirroring the complexity of constructing a rational, truthful and coherent chronicle. Thus, three decades after the beginning of the siege of Sarajevo, the ICTY archival instruments, which were created 'to establish an authoritative and impartial historical record and to deter future crimes, all in the name of promoting reconciliation and sustainable peace' (Clark 2008), gain even more value in exhuming our collective memory from the decades of a stale socio-political

landscape and address the readjusted narratives that portray the aggressor not just as a perpetrator but also as an equal victim as a consequence of collateral damage from a war they consciously devised and meticulously planned.

According to multiple expert statements, including UN military observer Richard Mole's testimony, the RS army implemented 'a policy of containment'. The Sarajevo Romanija Corps exerted control over the city and pursued political goals beyond Sarajevo by refraining from a direct occupation; instead, the RS army kept the city under siege. Throughout the war, the RS army executed pressure through means of terror on the city and its citizens, while achieving their political aims in other regions. Mole also recognised a rather practical military goal alongside the obvious political aims, arguing that the Romanija Corps, while advantageous in heavy weaponry, was short on infantry. This was best demonstrated in 'the Otes offensive and the fact that it took them a significant amount of time to take a relatively small area of the city'.¹⁰

Comparison of reports by military experts representing the BiH and RS armies, as well as by UN military observers, construct an intricate web of arguments, facts and statements leading to diverging narratives and precarious re-examination of the siege. Was the city of Sarajevo ever under siege by the Army of Republika Srpska? Were the citizens of Sarajevo exposed to nearly four years of systematic killings, physical and mental torture, agony and suffering, or was the city merely divided between the two opposing ethnic sides, each defending their own people's homes and neighbourhoods? For example, an emotionally insightful account by UN military observer J. P. Cutler, in his December 1992 report, records him stating: 'The resilience of the Sarajevo people continues to amaze me. Most go about their daily business as if there was no war.' This statement was taken out of context by the military expert Radovan Radinović during his testimony as defence witness, who purposefully used the term 'the Muslim part of Sarajevo' to spin the reality of the multiethnicity of Sarajevo's citizenship and shift the responsibility of numerous civilian casualties to 'Muslim' authorities, arguing that they failed the legal obligation of commanders 'to impose the necessary safety limitations which would bring down to the minimum civilian losses as collateral damage'.¹¹

Re-examining these diverging statements and the impact of clarifying historical 'conduits', together with preserving and cultivating collective

10 Ratko Mladić, Case No. IT-09-92-T D44014-D43932, Prosecution Rule 92ter Motion: Richard Mole (RM143) (International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia 24 September 2012).

11 Stanislav Galić, Case No. IT-98-29-T D0508-D7705, Sarajevo Battlefield 1992–1994, Military Expertise, Belgrade 2002, Defence's Submission Pursuant to Rule 94bis of Expert Report of Prof. Dr. Radovan Radinović, page 115 (International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia 21 November 2002).

remembrance, continues to be a crucial agonistic pathway in dealing with a complicated past. Barsalou and Baxter argue that banal name plaques and grandiose monumental sculptures ‘run the risk of being either ignored or amended by others who perceive the memorials as frozen in the past’ (Barsalou and Baxter 2007, 14) because this type of memorialisation lacks instrumental elements for multigenerational educational initiatives as well as a spatial framework for socio-cultural reciprocity when confronting the past. Memorial sites with a dynamic engagement approach that combines archival documentation, testimonial input and ease of accessibility – as exemplified at the Memoria Abierta¹² in Argentina and District Six Museum¹³ in South Africa – build inclusive spaces for history, remembrance, education and dialogue. Similarly, in the case of Sarajevo’s unmarked and forgotten battlefield, the reverberation of testimonial voices serves as an influential framework to revitalise an exhaustive metamorphosis of intricately webbed ethnocultural identities and to facilitate the development of a noteworthy site of remembrance as a reinterpretation of time, place and memory.

Belligerently readjusted narratives are used by the Army of Republika Srpska defence team and the general public within the same ethnic group to belittle their role as aggressors and tormentors (both of innocent civilians and on the official military battlefields) and portray themselves as equal victims and collateral damage of the war. This manipulation of fragments of the past and their reiteration in a rhetoric of national antagonism supports the well-known argument about the selective use of collective memories, aiming to suppress and elevate opposing narratives to challenge the authenticity of memory (Said 2000). Shifting from an exclusive heroic self-image to acknowledging historical accountability, fostering awareness of transitional justice and implementing dialogic inclusive memory requires mutual perceptions that can accept and endorse the credibility of the past and support the social and cultural values of conflicted society in the future (Assmann 2015).

12 Memoria Abierta (<https://memoriaabierta.org.ar>) is an alliance of Argentinian human rights organisations that promotes memory in relation to human rights violations and contributes to the visibility of the sites used in the repression, seeking to promote debates to narrate the country’s complicated past.

13 District Six Museum (<https://www.districtsix.co.za>) is a memory of a mixed community and its non-white residents who were displaced during the apartheid. Collecting memories of former residents, the museum uses mapping, oral history and action research approaches to facilitate reunions, exhibitions, education and intergenerational programmes.

5 Forgotten Battlefield: Liminality as a Meaning-Making Practice

Our brief exploration of the spatial liminality of remembrance, seized in the process between retrieval of the past and reconstruction of memory, shows the separation of one space from another: one political narrative and timeline from another, diametrically opposed, historical collective. The interplay between diverging historical facts, strategic forgetting and transformative memoryscapes strongly influences and, in many instances, hinders the (re) interpretation of official commemoration and cultural preservation of sites of difficult histories. The dichotomy between transformation in the political landscape and the malleability of memory over time outlines a framework, even if ambiguous, for a process towards agonistic remembrance in post-conflict society. Rather than being immersed in hardened historical narratives, many scholars argue that memorial museums, monuments and other sites of remembrance need to be multidimensional, non-static and experiential to escape invisibility and meaninglessness (Williams 2007; Young 2018; Tanović 2019; Bevan 2022).

The vast number of memorials in Bosnia and Herzegovina singularly glorify military leaders, notable battles, valiant fallen soldiers or civil victims within each ethnic entity, or simply serve as a demarcation of the fractured territory. Due to the lack of comprehensive countrywide guidelines for official monument construction, the process to preserve and nurture culture of remembrance is more antagonistic and underpins ethnic and political division even more deeply. Shifting to agonistic pathways of remembrance, collective memory must undergo a realignment and give way to a more dialogue-driven process of engaging with the encapsulated past. As Assmann writes, 'cultural memory works by reconstructing and always relating its knowledge – by material carriers such as memorials, monuments, museums, and archives – to an actual and contemporary situation' (Assmann 2011). An example of a more inclusive memorial, without a focus on a single ethnic group, is the *Sarajevo Roses*. These are traces of explosion and shrapnel scarring on the streets, painted in red (Junuzović 2006). Considered as documentary memorials, they represent embedded fragments of tactile memory that simply mark a historical fact, without really belonging to any particular party, group or individual.

To address the intricate task of making unseen war heritage meaningful again to nuance the official memory work, Ćatović Hughes' work *Forgotten Battlefield* started as an investigative study for the development of Azići-Otes battlefield memorialisation and culminated in a public exhibition, presenting multiperspectival witness testimonies alongside personal reinterpretation of place and memory. The project aims to open up a space for

dialogue about accountability and a more viable agonistic collective memory. The author researched documents collected from the ICTY archives to draw a parallel between a personal quest for fragments of the past and an open platform to sustain collective multigenerational memory. Her personal motivation stemmed from the fact that her father fought and was killed on this battlefield. Mental flexibility to recombine events, fragmenting episodic personal memory and the use of microseconds of an isolated event evoked a particular reaction of emotions and led to a conceptual process of abstraction – the reconstructed memory as a record of her interpretations of past experiences. Visual language and layers of retrieved mnemonic episodes resuscitated fragments of failing memory into a cohesive narrative. This process is naturally infiltrated by invisible voices, threads of previous recognition and shattered graphic flashbacks. It echoes Said's observation that our contested past has often been exploited and misused because the representation of memory pertains to perceptions of identity and ethnic authoritarianism (Said 2000).

The site visit in December 2022, as part of the investigative study, helped deposit additional fragments of the 'unseen' into the process of constructing a cohesive retrieval of past events in order to reassemble a trace and reinterpret time, place and memory. It was a cold, grey and overcast winter day, perhaps not all that different from thirty years ago. The area of Azići near the former sock factory Čarapara, the Catholic monastery and the vast open field, Livada, were eerily still. The trace of trenches was not evident, only a slight imperfection of the ground. The concrete ruin, covered in graffiti, was echoing with distant cries of stray dogs seeking shelter and food in the vicinity. Facing the western part of the city, the former frontline and now overgrown open space that was once a web of trenches, Čarapara sits broken, uncared for and abandoned as a memento, intuitively commemorating the forgotten battlefield and lives lost. Old scars on the exterior frame the views into the distance, beyond the frontline, towards the mountains. Amid rubble and decaying remnants of the past, a bright green moss has infiltrated the concrete floor surface – a symbolic gesture of resilience despite the circumstances (see Figure 4.2).

The reconstruction of fragmented material pieces encouraged a shift in scale from the most personal, intimate storytelling to representation of site of memory. It demonstrated how one story can become part of a public space, serving to preserve, educate and retrace selected history. Autobiographical memory, viewed as a process that depends on neurological developments necessary for the development of memory, especially episodic memory (Kuusisto-Arponen 2017), was crucial in the interactive development of the project. Across social, cognitive and communicative domains it served functional goals and rendered



FIGURE 4.2 *Forgotten Battlefield*, Azići and Otes, Sarajevo

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the correlation of experiential fragments between self, place and memory as profoundly interconnected with a wide range of historical and socio-material contexts. As an inception of a lengthy and complex process of memorialisation, the initial findings and interpretations of *Forgotten Battlefield* were presented in a public exhibition in Sarajevo in March 2023 (Kurtić 2023). The exhibition comprised three parts: 'Documentation,' 'Visual Storytelling' and 'Echo of Senses.'

'Documentation' was conceived as a linear element suspended in a seemingly endless line of filing folders extracted from the ICTY archive's storage drawers, evoking the magnitude of the tribunal process. Copies of reports were displayed densely together, with some empty folders to refer to the many unresolved cases, providing only occasional glimpses of content in a number of clear folders. Countless statements, witness reports and years of dedicated work to prosecute only a small number of war criminals responsible for the atrocities in Sarajevo and the rest of Bosnia and Herzegovina were exhibited on several panels around the room, without any discernible beginning or end. 'Visual Storytelling' dissolved personal memory and reconstructed traces from three decades ago. The path – illustrating the author's father's journey from home to command centre and, further, to the battlefield and the location where he was killed – was stitched on top and layered with translucent vellum paper over the city street map. Diagrams and visual comparison of satellite images of the battlefield, twenty years apart, outlined faint traces of the former trenches and fragmented remnants of scarred spaces. The reinterpretation of the evolution of landscape, transitioning from a dense to a more permeable surface, evoking movement in the trenches at the frontline, was

captured as a storyboard with overlapping layers of multiple monoprints in black and red ink. Finally, 'Echo of Senses' seized the central space and positioned the audience towards a distant view – 18 translucent prints adhered to large windowpanes capturing the view from the western boundary towards the free zone. A series of suspended linear elements with bright green moss transplanted from the site embedded tactile artefacts and elicited a response to pause and engage in the process of remembrance and collective memorialisation.

The oscillation between individual and collective remembrance, along with the groundwork facilitating relevant remembrance with multigenerational longevity, is also often prolonged due to the complex socio-political landscape and intricate layers of cultural response and acceptance. The eradication of truth, veiled in spineless narratives, emboldens us survivors to combat this with an ethics of remembrance through memory. In their report focused on various elements of a lengthy process of memorialisation, Barsalou and Baxter discuss the lack of better integration of memorialisation as an essential tool in peacebuilding and transitional justice efforts. In fact, they argue that 'the repeated failure to deal with memorials (whether ad hoc or sanctioned) and their potentially negative impact can imperil transitional justice efforts' (Barsalou and Baxter 2007, 2), perpetuating the nourishment of antagonistic seeds. Harvesting documentation from justice tribunals and trials, such as oral histories and other documentary evidence that accurately outlines previously concealed aspects of the conflicted past, contributes to an evolving multigenerational narrative about the past and sets the boundaries for dynamic civic engagement in the process of memorialisation. Collaboration in creating spaces for 'performances of democracy, not static representation of national identity' (Sevcenko, as quoted by Barsalou and Baxter 2007, 14) is therefore directly linked to the transitional justice accountability process and the facilitation of initiatives for educational dialogue at sites of remembrance as an integral part of preserving the collective remembrance.

6 Conclusion

The narratives of Vraca and Azići-Otes show that both sites are not just cold, unseen or forgotten physical remnants that are simply left from the past. Instead, they embody collective memories and directly feature in articulating personal and collective identities. In this, they are key mediums that can be employed in processes of construction of agonistic remembrance based on a multiperspective dialogue. These sites and engagement with them remind us

of the need for more complex readings of official sites of memory and critical examination of both micro- and macro-histories to find those sites rendered invisible by monologic socio-political hegemonies. Memorials and monuments around the Balkans, as symbols of reconstructed narratives of the past, often are viewed through the lens of a single ethnic identity, perpetuating a fragmented memoryscape instead of engineering a systematic approach for transitional justice as an infrastructure for agonistic trajectory. The platform of the ICTY and its archives laid the groundwork to provide reparations to victims, initiate cross-ethnic dialogues and then legitimise crimes committed against civilians and the urban fabric. The archives can serve not only as a tool for facing contested narratives, reconciliation and the prevention of future similar atrocities but also as an integral part of transforming sites of memory into visible defragmentation.

In terms of design and art practices on these sites, adopting a continuous rather than absolute approach allows us to examine a context as a multi-dimensional space and to compare contexts against one another. The claim that 'contentious coexistence' is a possible way forward, requiring 'stimulating the capacity of empathy and the mutual recognition of conflicting points of view on both the past and present within an agonistic frame' (Martin and Hansen 2021, 175), potentially brings us closer to a collectively agreeable way to define and study liminal spaces of remembrance. However, there are many questions. While activist curatorial activities at Vraca clearly aim to bring forward values that are deemed no longer representative of the collective community, what does the complete omission of the Azići-Otes site in the official commemorative practices mean? Systematisation and individual digestion of trauma and difficult experiences take time, and reconstructing memory can be a very slow process. This process does not fit equally for everyone into the same framework of therapy, recovery, reconciliation, and forgiveness. Public memory of difficult history spans generations and, as such, weaves the past into the everyday existence of a post-conflict society.

Following years of an active role in shaping the judicial framework, the impact of the ICTY resonates in a holistic way across individual and collective narratives. Similarly, using the archives as a method for assessing, classifying and applying knowledge about the rupture between perpetrators and victims resonates across generations to illustrate a fractured past and reassemble a multi-layered present. According to Nenad Veličković, the editor of education magazine *Skolegijum*, the moratorium to temporarily suspend the study of the war in schools, adopted in Bosnia in 2000 and ended in 2018, was proposed by the Council of Europe and 'intended to enable historians from all communities [...] to develop a common approach' (Dizdarević 2023). Since then, school textbooks have used information from unverified sources, often altering judicially

determined facts. In collaboration between the European Association of History Educators (EuroClio) and the Sarajevo Information Centre, a series of training workshops on the use of the ICTY archives was held in Sarajevo in 2022. The workshops included 25 history teachers from across BiH, as well as 10 representatives of history teachers' associations from other regions of the former Yugoslavia, 'providing a valuable regional perspective in creating educational materials' (Dizdarević 2023). Additionally, the Balkan Investigative Reporting Network (BIRN) has sifted thousands of pages of Hague Tribunal verdicts and spoken to witnesses to war crimes across the country to create a database of established facts and develop teaching materials to help educators use the new resource in the classroom. These steps exemplify the importance of fighting against 'the relativisation of history and revisionism' (Dizdarević 2023) and the value of the collection of testimonial archives and legal discourse from the tribunal. The latest interlude in the fight against historical revisionism, and most likely an act of reprisal against the UN Resolution on the Srebrenica Genocide adopted in May 2024, confirms a continuation of the ethnonationalist seesaw in the region. The Ministry of Education and Culture of Republika Srpska introduced new history textbooks in the 2024–25 academic year that include learning about the 'defence-patriotic war' and its heroes Ratko Mladić and Radovan Karadžić, 'individuals who performed important duties in the military and political life of the Republika Srpska' (Boračić Mršo 2024). The textbooks, scandalously, omit any details of the ICTY verdicts for these 'heroes' as war criminals convicted of crimes against humanity, genocide and violations of the laws of war.

Ideally, the convergence of transitional justice systems and the memorialisation process can be an incentive for generations with second-hand memories to critically approach the complexities of sites of difficult histories and move away from the uncomplicated 'facelift' approach observed in some examples related to the Vraca case. A more dynamic, proactive and inclusive memorial environment can open up possibilities for materialising agonistic pathways to bridge systems and their diverging ways of remembrance. The *Forgotten Battlefield* installation, focused on Azići-Otes, intersects with the multiperspectivity of collective narratives, individual testimonies and tactile memory of a disappearing past. Its multimodal approach – combining the official archival documents with personal experiences and a poetic interpretation of collective narratives – identifies underutilised potential for creating a transformative site of remembrance that confronts hegemonic narratives. The juxtaposition of proximity in revealing diverging narratives extracted from the transitional justice archival repository stimulates multiperspectivist reflection and elicits an agonistic response for the interpretation of fixed past and malleable future discourse.

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