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TRAUMA NARRATIVES AND THE POLITICIZED PAST:  
LITERATURE, FILM AND CIVIL SOCIETY IN BOSNIA-HERZEGOVINA  
June 24-November 8, 2013  
Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina

**RESEARCH ABSTRACT**

The field research I carried out in Bosnia during this period aimed to complement the analysis of published literary texts and films with which my dissertation is primarily engaged. This dissertation project focuses on literature and film produced since the war in Bosnia (1992-1996), and explores how the palpable traces of the past in the present in Bosnia are sustained and employed with reference and recourse to cultural production. My working hypothesis, and the presumption that organized my investigation of a variety of sources, is that ongoing engagement with the traumatic past happens primarily through the narrative and visual mechanisms of symbolization, testimony, and ritual. By investigating archival material and observing commemorative practices during the research period, I sought to situate works of art in their immediate context, and elucidate the lasting role these works play in shaping both the experience and the memory of trauma. Tracing out salient rhetorical and mnemonic processes operative in recent Bosnian literature, film, and cultural discourse illuminates not only the contested nature of memories in today's Bosnia, but provides insight into how institutions aimed at truth-telling, reconciliation, social justice, and lasting peace might better structure and present successful initiatives.

**RESEARCH GOALS**

The research detailed here constitutes an important part of my doctoral dissertation, which considers how individual and social suffering in wartime and postwar Bosnia is framed rhetorically and symbolically in artistic media, documentary testimony, memorial sites, public and private commemorations, and institutions of culture. The project analyzes how modes of narrating trauma operate within larger discussions about social memory in Bosnian civil society. It argues that understanding how Bosnians employ these narrative and visual techniques to imagine and re-imagine trauma is crucial to making sense of historical events, memorial practices, and political citizenship. Further, it identifies counternarratives and efforts to reimagine the past outside of

dominant frameworks that hold sway in today's Bosnia, indicating the existence of new possibilities for commemoration, transitional justice, and social cohesion in the future.

My project is theoretically situated in the fields of interdisciplinary trauma and memory studies. The term "trauma" is used to describe many aspects of recent Bosnian lived experience, from the violent death of loved ones to the dissolution of multiethnic communities. Despite its salience in the public imaginary and critical literature, the relationship between trauma and memorial practice in the case of Bosnia's recent past is insufficiently understood. The undeniably high incidence of PTSD and other symptoms in Bosnian civilians and soldiers makes it clear that individuals were traumatized by brutal years of war and by new forms of violence and stress that manifested themselves in the postwar period. In addition, the destruction of social resources and mechanisms for mitigating the effects of individual trauma meant that Bosnian society as a whole underwent a vast and long-lasting series of traumas. Trauma is identified by its symptoms and by descriptions of how memory, cognition, and points of view have been radically altered by the traumatizing experience. Trauma is thus intimately connected to narrative practices and politics of memory. I maintain that, in order to understand social trauma in Bosnia, it is critical to delineate how trauma-inflected memories are articulated, managed, and reworked in the public sphere through narrative and symbolic processes.

Fiction and memorial practice do not simply recapitulate the literal experience of massive violence, "ethnic cleansing," genocide, rape, torture, and grief. Instead, they constitute intellectual and emotional interventions into and interpretations of the past and its relation to the present. It is precisely the nonlinear and metaphorical aspects of artwork, and the participatory, ritualistic, and extemporaneous nature of memorial practice, that allows these creative techniques to make the memory of traumatic experience coherent and enduring.

My research during the grant period sought to bring together activity in spheres of public culture that are often analyzed separately: the production and reception of literature and film; the creation and contestation of memorial sites; participation in commemorative practices; and institutional efforts both to preserve cultural heritage and to make possible infrastructure for renewed cultural production.

### **RESEARCH ACTIVITIES**

My four and a half month research period in Bosnia was divided among several major areas. Because the focus of my work aimed to detail the historical and cultural context and reception of primary literary texts and films, I located and scanned a large number of journal articles. Of particular importance were those published in the popular press during the war. Additionally, I

participant observed at two summer events: the annual memorial ceremony at Srebrenica-Potočari commemorating the 1995 genocide (July 10-11), and the Sarajevo Film Festival (August 16-24).

The archival research I conducted at the Sarajevo Historical Archive was especially productive. I worked extensively with the political/cultural journal *BH Dani* [Bosnian-Herzegovinian Days], which was founded several months before the war and played a crucial role in reporting on and publishing independent commentary on both the war and postwar society from a variety of perspectives. Looking in depth into *Dani* proved helpful to my larger dissertation project, because a number of regular contributors and editors were prominent literary and cultural figures whose works have a place in the canon of postwar Bosnian literature and, I argue, help to frame the experience of war in ways that remain visible to the present day. It will be important for my dissertation to flesh out an analysis of the fiction and poetry of authors like Semezdin Mehmedinović, Aleksandar Hemon, and Miljenko Jergović that takes into account their frequent critical and editorial work in *Dani*.

At the Historical Archive, I also read and scanned materials from the film periodical *Sineast*. Since its founding in 1967, this journal had been an important contribution to film scholarship in the region, publishing criticism of recent Yugoslav and world films and festivals, articles on film production and theory, and translations of classic and recent global cinema scholarship. As a publication with an established history, *Sineast* fascinatingly reconfigured itself into a self-titled “War *Sineast*,” devoting rhetorical and material assistance to preserving physical reels of film that were threatened to be destroyed, advocating for film production and funding in the postwar and post-socialist period, and supporting ongoing film scholarship in Bosnia. *Sineast* thus gave me insight into how film professionals were thinking about and discussing film during and after the war, and how analysis of film in context related to widespread narratives about and social memories of the war.

In the National and University Library, I consulted the wartime runs of *Bistro Oko* (an activity magazine for children), *Enigma* (a variety magazine) and *Tunel Post* (a humor magazine). I also scanned pamphlets in the Biblioteka “EGZIL-abc” series, including: Izet Sarajlić, *Sarajevska ratna zbirka*; Nedžad Ibrišimović, *Knjiga Adema Kahrimana*; Ferida Duraković, *Selidba iz lijepog kraja* and *Mikijeva abeceda*; Goran Simić, *Sarajevska tuga*; Farah Tahirbegović, *Pismo roditeljima*.

In addition to the archival work with print media, I viewed film and multi-media materials, including the FAMA Collection (discussed at some length below).

Because of the constraints placed on publishing in Bosnia, quality fiction and scholarly texts are often difficult to locate. I spent considerable time scouting for and purchasing books at local bookstores (BuyBook, v/b/z, Šahinpašić, Connectum) and book fairs throughout my time in Bosnia.

Finally, I participated in and observed the genocide commemoration ceremony in Srebrenica-Potočari, and took notes on the event. I realized that, in order to meaningfully analyze the place and shape of war memories in Srebrenica, it would be necessary to spend several months living in the town, building relationships with informants and conducting a series of interviews. I therefore focused only on the commemoration, analyzing its ritual function and component parts as they are mobilized to elicit and solidify social memory of the genocide.

I also attended and observed the Sarajevo Film Festival in August. Film festivals in general function as performative rituals with a set of organizing principles, characters, spaces, and sense of timing. Because it was founded during the war—and to much acclaim—I maintain that the SFF, moreover, plays an ongoing role in framing social memory of the war. Thinking about the Sarajevo Film Festival as a heterotopic space helps trace out more thoroughly its salience in the cultural imaginary from its inception, and which continues to the present.

### **IMPORTANT RESEARCH FINDINGS**

I have not thoroughly analyzed the large amount of materials collected during the research period, and therefore it is too soon to draw encompassing conclusions. I will comment here on two areas of investigation that I find especially illustrative of a number of thematic and theoretical threads that I pursued in my research activities.

*FAMA Collection:* First of all, my work with the digital archive and virtual museum curated by the Sarajevo-based media company FAMA proved valuable to my overall conceptualization of the social, mediated, and artistically framed work of memory in the wartime and postwar period. The digital collection was launched on April 5<sup>th</sup>, 2012 as part of the large-scale events (both local, global, and virtual) to commemorate the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the beginning of the war in Sarajevo. Indeed, the authors note that “in 1991, we actually entered a world that history, literature and art have dealt with for centuries. We remained there until 2011, during which time we recognized some hitherto unknown, but very important, survival trends which today, in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, emerge as a vital interest. It took exactly 20 years for us to close this cycle.”<sup>1</sup> Conceiving of the boundaries of their work in this way, FAMA’s stated central tenets underlying the creation of this collection, while somewhat opaque, nonetheless make clear a commitment to a specific type of

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<sup>1</sup> All translations here and following are my own.

memorial practice. These tenets are 1) to “make the obvious visible,” 2) to “communicate Collective memory with a human touch,” and 3) to “bridge the digital gap between the Culture of remembrance and the real-time Search for knowledge.”

These “new media” aspects of archiving and presenting the past seem to be predicated on the notion that the work of memory involves dynamic engagement, mediation and re-mediation. The collection’s use of bottom-up strategies of documentary and oral history alongside top-down didactic and activist framing devices, meanwhile, presents conflicting portraits of how immediate or hypermediated approaches to the recent past are, the degree to which media and technologies frame knowledge about past events, and the role of media in shaping social memory. In the context of postwar Bosnia, where the politics of memory are omnipresent in and often constitutive of the public sphere, the FAMA collection serves as a testament both to the possibilities and strictures of social memory work about the tragic, traumatic, and divisive recent past.

One of the major features of the collection is a comprehensive chronology of the siege of Sarajevo. The project correlates local and international news archives with UN reports. It also integrates material from surveys and interviews with Sarajevans begun right after the reintegration of the city (March, 1996). As in many other modules of the Collection, the temporal proximity of the chronology’s compilation process to the events detailed in it is heralded as a point of value and proof of the veracity of the data presented. Memory is something that fades and deteriorates, and individual memories must be “captured” before they depreciate in value or are lost altogether. This conception that individual memories must be fixed in place, and that truth about past events can be arrived at by collecting individual stories permeates the chronology project. It is imagined in positivist terms as the “transfer of experience into knowledge” and the “meaningful structuring of facts.”

In this way, we see the assumptions about media entwined with those concerning memory. “Facts” must be “structured” and converted into a format suitable for disseminating to a wider public. The metaphor of “mapping” becomes a crucial one insofar as it adheres to the idea that, no matter how they are laid out, facts exist and indeed remain immutable. Thus, the chronology’s transition from basic digital format to eventual 3-D map that integrates content with other areas of the FAMA website signals a new organizational strategy that nonetheless preserves an idea that memories are captured, though they might subsequently be arranged and rearranged.

A project linked from its beginning with the fuller development of the chronology, the FAMA oral history project involved almost one thousand interviews with more than 450 Sarajevans from all walks of life; it resulted in 50 hours of raw, and 30 hours of edited, video footage. Additionally,

the so-called “Survival” survey polled around 4600 people using 31 set questions ranging from “how many kilograms did you lose during the siege?” to “what were your personal achievements during the siege?” The survey was carried out shortly after the siege was lifted, and the testimony project started 18 months later. In both of these related projects, the editors stress their intent to capture memories “while they are still fresh.” The narratives of ordinary citizens are dated, transcribed and translated, tagged with key words. In this way, they are synced with both the FAMA chronology as well as with related images and other media content.

The discursive frames employed by the authors of the oral history project undeniably ally individual memories and narratives with the aforementioned “human touch” that ought to be (re)inserted into collective memory. Oral history here as a technique for approaching the siege of Sarajevo is presented as an alternative to information contained in official documents and histories—a bottom-up approach common to many oral history projects and theories about oral history from the 1960s onward (cf. Portelli). The editors of the oral history projects highlight the subjective nature of these interviews, the fact that they contain “very lively descriptions,” “emotional testimonies,” and “inspirational stories.” And it is these particular attributes which motivate them to draw a connection between individual oral narrative captured on film and truth about past events. In a striking way, they describe the FAMA oral history project in toto as “preserving the truth about our research subject.”

Meanwhile, the emphasis placed on a wide variety of respondents, on the decentralized nature of the testimony, and on the various perspectives collected on events might seem to point to a conception of the remembered past as incontrovertibly subjective and contested. Indeed, this view is one often heard in the Bosnian media about events and actions from the wartime period. FAMA takes a slightly different tack, but one that I argue specifically emerges from this larger context of contested and contestable individual and social memories. The decentralized, polyphonic oral histories are framed within a view of memory that functions as a process of triangulation. Therefore, when the editors of the oral history project point out the frequent coincidences in the interview material—the fact that many interviewees comment on the importance of work, movement, and cigarettes during the siege, for example—these memories are triply validated: first, by the fact that they are told by individual persons; second, that they are captured on film close to events and before interviewees “change their minds according to, for example, changes in their political views;” and finally, that they are repeated by several interviewees.

And while the oral history section’s exhibit material does point out the potential role of interview questions in shaping commonalities in individual memories about the wartime past, this

facet of social memory's mediation is largely left unexplored. The process of framing, the repeated images and phrases employed in talking about the siege of Sarajevo, extend far beyond the FAMA collection. Bosnian literature, film, and criticism in the wartime and postwar period is involved in multidirectional social processes of remembering the war that has, in the intervening period, created complex webs of memory that rely on—and, simultaneously, re-imagine—geographical sites, patterns of speech, objects of both high culture and everyday use, subjects and devices used in photography and film, and intertextual references and allusions. Thus, when many participants in the oral history project remark on the charred book pages they saw floating up from the burning National and University Library on August 25, 1992, I maintain that the triangulation at work is much more complexly mediated than indicated by the editors, and such memories cannot, in fact, merely be “captured”—but must be investigated as equally the products and producers of frames for thinking about the past and one's individual and social participation in that past.

A significant portion of the FAMA Digital Collection website is devoted to showcasing, and to a large extent remediating, earlier projects carried out during the war years. I focus here on the “Survival” projects: the Survival Art Museums, the Survival Map, and the Survival Guide. The organizing principles of each of these projects is not only survival as an art, or the existence of creativity in impossible conditions, but the act of creation as a principled stance against destruction, chaos, and violence. Such a principle forms a significant mechanism or frame through which the Bosnian past is mediated in genres of representation and discourse more broadly.

The Museums—instantiations of which were constructed in 1992 and 1994 in Sarajevo, and 1996 in Tokyo—exhibited wartime stoves, fashion, meals, water canisters, ammunition, lamps, artworks, and theater pieces. The editors maintain that all of these “creative oddities, most of which showed no obvious connection to the war that at times raged only yards away, exemplified that Survival Art had an attitude.” The Survival Guide was the self-proclaimed “museum catalogue” and “lesson on methods of post-cataclysm survival.” Even more than the museum exhibits, the Survival Guide was suspended between bitterly practical tips (how to make French fries from flour, and cheese from humanitarian aid rice) and, alternatively sarcastic and ironic commentary on siege conditions and the art of survival.

The Survival Map, meanwhile, depicted besieged Sarajevo graphically (in both senses of the word), its well-known landmarks ringed by hand-drawn tanks. Like the Survival Guide, the Map serves both a practical function and a meta-documentary one. It highlights the “danger zones” most vulnerable to snipers, while both portraying the new wartime spatial layout of the city and

providing extensive commentary on the way buildings, space, and movement were repurposed, changed, and resignified.

In each of these projects, we see a basic assumption that objects serve to anchor narrative memory, and that creative manipulation and construction function as methods of commemoration. However, the possibility that cultural production indeed creates the texture of memory is not taken up by the editors, even as it might productively inform a user's approach to the creative projects showcased on the FAMA site.

Instead, the idea that memory can—and should—serve a practical function strongly undergirds the authorial discussion of these three sections. "The world needs the experience of Sarajevo!" they claim, and go on to merge memorial activity with basic survival: "experience means lessons and instructions on how to react and survive if we find ourselves in a situation similar to one already experienced (somewhere, by someone).... We must preserve our memory of the past in order to provide efficient channel of information for current and future generations on how to acquire and apply knowledge and ensure our Collective Global Memory to be preserved forever, no matter what the future holds."

The idea that memory is useful for living in the "post-apocalyptic" 21<sup>st</sup> century, advanced by various elements of the collection, is connected to the claim that the FAMA collection's memorial work, particularly the oral history material, supports "truth and reconciliation." However, this connection should not be seen as self-evident and, in fact, demands critical analysis. Recalling past events, whether one's own or those to which one has access through communicative memory, as a survival technique (this basic evolutionary tenet of autobiographical memory) finds a social correlate in the idea that testimony, as the public act of narrating remembered events, is useful to knowing the truth about the past, reconciling contested accounts, and seeking justice for crimes. This connection, it seems to me, rests on the conviction that the act of remembering *is always* therapeutic for individuals and for societies. But does the therapeutic value of remembering itself not fundamentally rest on a conception that memory is a reservoir or a repository whose contents can be directly accessed? In the case of the FAMA collection, I would argue that the dominant idioms about memory's social capacity employed by its authors in many ways prevent the rich documentary and creative material from alternatively framing specific memories—and memory itself—and possibly from being framed alternatively by the site's users.

*Sarajevo Film Festival:* As mentioned briefly above, the Sarajevo Film Festival, I argue, functions as an act of memorialization that offers a window into the way social and artistic frames function in the wartime and postwar period. This festival was organized in the second year of the

war, from the 23<sup>rd</sup> of October to the 3<sup>rd</sup> of November, 1993 and bore the arresting title, “After the End of the World.” This title was an obvious play on the 1991 Wim Wenders film, “To the End of the World,” screened at the festival. But in introductory remarks printed on the festival program, one of the organizers, Haris Pašović claimed that in Sarajevo, nineteen months into the war, “we are living after the end of the world.” It is this type of formulation that both expresses a collectively felt sentiment about the war in Bosnia, as well as serves a generative function in summing up, conceptualizing, and making traumatic lived experience accessible.

A good deal of scholarship on film festivals has highlighted the way in which these events function as *events* that, as film scholar Cindy Wong puts it, “intersect with other discourses and institutions in the wider construction of film as a field of knowledge” (15). Film festivals have the potential to reflect, refract, and reconceptualize the elements of which they are made up—namely, the films screened, audiences and film industry workers in attendance, and places that host the event. For this reason, it makes sense to think of film festivals in general as heterotopias in the Foucauldian sense. That is, as spaces both “real” and “unreal,” “counter-sites” that are related to space and yet not fixed in it, whose existence bears on the surrounding space, time, and society in which these heterotopias exist.

On one hand, the first Sarajevo Film Festival (and subsequent ones, although I will not focus on them here) is fully grounded in time and space. It took place in the city, with screenings held in the Radnik, Romanija, and Apollo cinemas. On the other, however, as both a media and an intensely *mediated* event, it also transcended these bonds of time and space and, in fact, focused attention on how time and space as topics in themselves. The conditions of war certainly augmented the heterotopic possibilities of the Festival, particularly because of the way in which war itself was being mediated and culturally represented (individually and collectively) in Sarajevo contemporaneously with the Festival. For instance, the Apollo, in the basement of the Academy of Performing Arts, had been screening domestic and foreign films to packed audiences, for the price of either a mark or a cigarette, on Wednesdays and Saturdays since February 1993. Concerts and installations were being organized, books were being published, and museums were exhibiting works. The commonplace idea that war reduces life to its biological needs, where the natural takes precedence over, or completely obscures, the cultural was not taken for granted. Challenging, if not overturning, this assumption through what was often termed acts of “cultural resistance” became one of the defining features of Sarajevo under siege—and has remained one of the dominant tropes of memorializing the war.

Indeed, this portrayal of Sarajevo as the locus of cultural capital is crucial to narrating and memorializing its siege. Whether seen as coexisting with, or triumphing over wartime conditions, the conspicuous presence of artistic life in Sarajevo serves as an argument for Sarajevo's exceptional character, and as a way of calibrating the extent and severity of war. Although present in the myth of Sarajevo in circulation were such elements as its multi-confessionality, cosmopolitanism, and artistic nature—it was the brutality of war refracted through these other defining attributes (or, perhaps more accurately, these attributes refracted through the lens of fantastically destructive war) that truly created the socially accessible idioms for talking about war and art, history and memory in Sarajevo. "Sarajevo is the city in which the world of the 20<sup>th</sup> century...died" (Pašović). The title of the first Festival can be seen as emblematic of this particular set of distinguishing characteristics and ways of orienting time, space, and belonging accordingly. After the end of the world, in a halting set of associative steps, again from Pašović: "Film. The 20<sup>th</sup> century. A new art form. Sarajevo. The end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The end of the world? The end of film?" We see in this development Pašović rhetorically establishing an apocalyptic framework, into which both Sarajevo of 1993 and the Film Festival fit—but also an apparatus that uses these two elements with recourse to the medium of film to establish a meaningful chronotope.

The centrality of film to the Festival's heterotopic organization of memory and meaning cannot be underestimated. In a phrase that has both the quality and transmissibility of a dark joke, Pašović notes that his standard response, when asked by foreign journalists (and, pointedly, not Sarajevans, never Sarajevans) "why a film festival in Sarajevo?" was to ask "and why are they killing us?" Here we see, probably most clearly, the twinned assumption that war and creative activity are mutually exclusive, and that the experience of trauma either demands realist portrayal or prevents meaningful reflection at all. The Festival, as journalist and author Mladen Sančanin points out, takes some of the structures of life under siege (in this case, queuing), and gives them both old and new meaning: "the city again can see lines, but not for bread or water; and its inhabitants can again staunch a hunger from which one cannot die, but without which one is not alive." And, indeed, this construction, the contrast between "merely surviving" and "really living" is constantly evoked in the literature.

Beyond a sense that art—and perhaps in particular the seventh art?—is uniquely constitutive of "living" is its role in establishing and marking out meaning in a chronotopical way. In an overview of the Festival from December, 1993, Karim Zaimović, renaissance adolescent of the wartime cultural scene in Sarajevo, maintains that "Sarajevans are simply hungry for film that was, in this case, much more than art or media, linked with 'a better past.'" In addition to the film

medium, and inseparable from it, however, is the particularity of the 1993 Festival in which “not infrequently the majority of visitors to one of the three Festival cinemas were not informed what film they were actually going to. In this way, cinema once again became a mysterious spectacle for the senses deadened by war.” Indeed, a notice was appended to the final page of the schedule, warning viewers that the organizers can’t promise anything, and no one can or should expect certainty about any aspect of the festival. Here, the medium of film becomes both a shorthand way to express the process of temporal foreshortening and extension that art—but also that violence or epistemic upheaval— can enact.

### **POLICY IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

Conducting research during this period, it was more striking than ever that the very possibility to carry out research at institutions of culture in Bosnia is not to be taken for granted. Legal technicalities introduced by the Dayton Accords, which ended open fighting in Bosnia, leaves the status and continued viability of seven major cultural institutions unresolved to this day: the National Library for the Blind and Partially Sighted Persons in BiH, the Historical Museum of BiH, the National Film Archive of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Museum of Literature and Theatre Arts of BiH, the National and University Library of BiH, the National Art Gallery of BiH, and the National Museum of BiH. Funded neither by the state (Bosnia-Herzegovina), the entity (the Federation), nor the canton (Sarajevo) in the postwar, post-Yugoslav, and post-socialist period, these “institutions of national relevance” have been threatened with actual or impending closure. If the National and University Library engulfed in flames in 1992 stands metonymically for the systematic violence mounted against culture during the war, the wooden planks nailed across the front doors of the National Museum in 2012 to mark its closure have become a hallmark symbol of the precarious status of cultural heritage in the postwar period. Anecdotally, while I did research at the National and University Library between August and October, because of outstanding bills and lack of resources, the library’s working hours were pushed from 8AM-4PM to 8AM-3PM, and again to 8AM-2:30PM, the building lacked proper heating, the librarians were bundled in coats and used a portable heater brought from home.

In response to the striking closure of the National Museum, and the likelihood that other institutions’ doors will imminently be shuttered, a transnational group of intellectuals, authors, and artists joined forces to launch a focused yet multi-faceted initiative known as “Culture Shutdown.” With its distinctive posters of major world museums and cultural objects covered by yellow police tape, as well as its centralized website for disseminating updates and hosting debates, Culture Shutdown plays a salient role in setting the terms for wider social discourse surrounding public

museums, archives, and cultural heritage. However, a campaign like this cannot singlehandedly enact the necessary changes to ensure that cultural institutions are able to exist in Bosnia today. Initiatives like Culture Shutdown, and others like it, should be the focus of sustained international attention and policy.

### **CO-CURRICULAR ACTIVITY**

During my research period, I had the chance to interact with the archivists and librarians at the Historical Archive and National and University Library. I visited art galleries and museums, and engaged in discussion with directors and curators. As mentioned above, I actively participated in the Sarajevo Film Festival, where, in addition to viewing films, I heard lectures and interviews by regional directors and artists. At the SFF, I also had the chance to chat informally with fellow festival-goers about their impressions of the event. Perhaps most meaningfully, I was able to discuss my work with fellow PhD student Ajla Demiragić and Professor Andrea Lešić-Thomas in the Department of Comparative Literature in the Philosophical Faculty at the University of Sarajevo. They both went out of their way to assist me in locating materials. During my next research trip, I have been offered a chance to guest lecture in the Comparative Literature Department.

### **CONCLUSIONS**

The power of competing versions of recent Bosnian history means that the scope of collective memory is as broad as its stakes are high. The International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia continues to sentence war criminals in the Hague, while these same individuals are viewed as heroes by many members of their ethno-religious groups. Attempts to establish local truth and reconciliation commissions have failed. The prevalence of “information intervention” by political and religious leaders, mass media channels, international organizations, and citizens’ assemblies alike indicate that issues of the wartime past are often dominated by denial, manipulation, and politicization along rigid ethno-religious lines. To what extent, then, in Bosnia of the postwar present can social forms of memory exist outside such circumscribed boundaries, and in what institutional contexts, rhetorical modes, and patterns of sociability do such alternatives for collective memory inhere? My research, both during the period described here and in my dissertation as a whole, investigates these contexts to illuminate how individual and social suffering is framed rhetorically and symbolically in artistic media, documentary testimony, memorial sites, public and private commemorations, and institutions of culture. By looking at the way fictional and nonfictional narratives, visual art and film, ritual memorial practices, and museum exhibits engage traumatic experience and establish key terms and parameters for discussing the past, I trace out what these modes of expression have in common, and in what essential ways do they pose

challenges to each other and to social memory projects in general. I hypothesize that interdisciplinary investigation of the memory of trauma in key aspects of Bosnian civil society not only offers insight into the limitations and strictures imposed on public and private memory, but also reveals overlooked possibilities for creative memorial activity that can and does exist in postwar Bosnian society.

#### **PLANS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH AGENDA/ PRESENTATIONS AND PUBLICATIONS**

After returning to my home institution, the University of Chicago, I have been working with the materials I collected in the field (scanned documents, notes, texts, and films). I recently presented a paper on the Sarajevo Film Festival at the annual Association for Slavic, Eastern European and Eurasian Studies conference in Boston. In April at the American Comparative Literature Association annual meeting, I will present a paper on the lasting effect of wartime artistic production in Sarajevo on the shared cultural memory of the city. It's my plan to have submitted one chapter, and drafted the remaining four chapters of my dissertation by the end of the current academic year (spring 2014). I have received a Fulbright-Hayes DDRA grant to return to Bosnia in June for six months of follow-up research. I am applying for a write-up fellowship for the last half of the 2014-2015 academic year, and hope to complete and defend my dissertation in June of 2015.

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