

The Story of Staro Sajmište Concentration Camp, Produced/Producing Europe

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This article aims at considering the story of the Belgrade Staro Sajmište Second World War concentration camp, as it unfolded since October 2007. At that point, it captured national and international headlines, as a range of actors rallied to ban the private use of this memory place for a concert by a British pop group. The article concentrates on patterns of construction of memory(ies), space and transfers of knowledge as well as power as the Staro Sajmište story is ‘uncovered’ to the public in mainstream mass media. The focus of inquiry extends beyond the official realm of memory to media representations as central aspects of contemporary manifestations of collective memory. The article intends to explore the construction of narratives, public discourse and identities that directly impact democratic practice and citizenship in the wake of the radical social and political change that Serbia has experienced in the recent past and during the Western Balkans European Union accession process. It demonstrates that the multiple (hi)stories and fractured mnemonic genealogies of Staro Sajmište produce, and are themselves produced by, the narrative of European participation and integration, in an interplay between different discursive layers, such as the national narrative, the international and European narrative and the local Jewish narrative, as well as practices of spatial reconstruction and consumerism. The article is informed by understandings of the Balkans as a space that is inside and outside Europe in many senses, traversed by flows of people, funding and ideas/imaginaries of Europe and European-ness, concretised in specific projects and the relations that constitute them.

Staro Sajmište is the area on the left bank of the Sava River, in the immediate vicinity of the historical center of the Serbian capital. Fairground buildings were constructed in 1937.

At the beginning of World War 2, the German occupation forces set up the Zemun concentration camp there. Over 7,000 imprisoned women and children from the last remaining Jewish families in Serbia were gassed to death in Nazi gas vans. After the almost complete annihilation of the Serbian Jews, about 100,000 prisoners from Serbia and neighboring countries passed through the camp. About 40,000 of them died there.

Today, there is only an inconspicuous memorial at this mass execution site. (www.B92.net)¹

Soon, the site where some 48,000 Jews, Serbs and Gypsies perished in the 1940s will be throbbing to the rhythms of rock music.

... 'It's like holding a wedding at a graveyard,' said Aleksandar Masic, a Jewish chairman of the camp's memorial center, ahead of the concert by British band Kosheen. (www.msnbc.msn.com, The Associated Press)²

The politics of a story

The British pop band Kosheen scheduled a concert for 3 November 2007 at the Poseydon club in Belgrade's Staro Sajmište area. The concert was abruptly cancelled and the alarm was signalled in major national and international news media, for the group was to hold a gig in the very building which, in the 1940s, housed Nazi guards and concentration camp inmates.

The trio were scheduled to play a gig at the Staro Sajmiste – but the concert was pulled after protests by the international Jewish human rights organisation, The Simon Wiesenthal Center. On Friday [2 November 2007], the organisation's director, Efraim Zuroff, said the concert would have taken place where 'tens of thousands of Serbs, Jews, Roma and Croats were killed during World War Two.' He added, 'A concert at this site would be an insult to the victims and memories of them.' Following Zuroff's comments, Kosheen cancelled the gig and posted an apology on their official website.³

Thus, the story of the Belgrade Staro Sajmište concentration camp became part of Second World War European memory, as a range of domestic, European and other actors dealing with the Holocaust rallied to ban the private commercial use of this memory place. Furthermore, this public space is situated in Serbia, a country that is in the process of joining the European Union, with the import and possibly translation of EU policies and practices impacting on power relations, knowledge and identity. Built originally as a twentieth-century exhibition grounds modernisation project, Staro Sajmište camp, in the spirit of brotherhood and unity of post-war Yugoslavia, became home to artists and two commemoration plaques, while – during and after the 1991–1999 secession and break up wars – the location became a private entertainment area for globalised pop culture. The location's urban centrality oxymoronically coincides with historical and symbolic marginality, as this public space underwent successive changes of (in)visibility and (in/ex)clusion as exhibition grounds and as a concentration camp, as well as of memorial (de)commemoration, as political agendas and memorial traditions defined it both discursively and physically, very much within a European context. Opposing voices, lack of consensus, social antagonisms, conflicting imaginaries, arise in the framework of efforts to domesticate memory and articulate a unified, homogenised narrative – be it associated with EU-governed and European belonging – inspired accession and/or state-led policies democratisation initiatives and discourses, and can be explored through the prisms of politics of visibility and possibilities for heterotopias and different senses of citizenship.

Serbia's Accession to the European Union

Until recently, Serbia, having shared experiences of war, flight, expulsion and post-1990s' war conflict, stood as the nation state stigmatised as the main aggressor in the Balkans' international community human rights discourse. Currently, European integration is proclaimed as the first priority for the country, and most political choices are set as

opposing binaries of being pro or contra Europe. Yet democratisation and nation-building, the two critical facets of current state power, still create strong political and social tensions, and resurgences of nationalisms underline the resilience of the nation state and the imaginaries that sustain it. Threads of conflicting histories run through the fabric of all these imagined communities. History and memory play an instrumental role in the conflicting strategies of identity construction in contemporary Serbia. While the issue of anti-Semitism cannot be over-emphasised, it seems that at least three other frames of interpretation should be added to draw a more complete picture. One of them is the context of post-socialist society and the subsequent transition to liberal democracy, deconstruction of normative systems and often political chaos, characteristic in Central and Eastern Europe, yet differently contextualised in former Yugoslavia. The 1990s' wars of the dissolution of Yugoslavia further complicate issues of majority–minority relations. Another is the context of globalised postmodern culture with its contradictory tendencies of rejecting the historical dimension of identity, while being obsessed with mass-mediated and largely commercialised memory. One could study the problem of politicisation of both history and memory in contemporary Serbia, with an emphasis on the 'historical politics' supported by the dominant political forces. Contemporary Serbian history has been marked by a tendency towards divided memory. Events have been interpreted in contrasting ways, and the facts themselves often contested, while with so little agreement over what happened, and why it happened, it has been extremely difficult to create consensus around memory. As Slobodan Naumovic argues,⁴ disunity and disaccord have acquired in the Serbian popular imaginary a notorious, quasi-demiurgic status, perceived as being the chief malefactors in Serbian history, causing political or military defeats, and threatening to tear Serbian society completely apart. Therefore, a complex set of deep-rooted self-perceptions and self-descriptions occupies a privileged place amongst what the anthropologist Marko Živković, paraphrasing Clifford Geertz, has termed 'stories Serbs tell themselves and others about themselves'.⁵

European integration in the Western Balkans also presents its own controversies (recent contributions to this discussion include Kostovicova and Bojicic-Dzelilovic,⁶ Pridham,⁷ Turkes and Gokgoz⁸); as Anastasakis writes:

EU conditions vary from the broad Copenhagen criteria to more focused conditions of the Association Agreements, to specific conditions linked to financial packages and projects. Other conditions emanate from the Dayton, Belgrade, and Ohrid peace accords. If conditions are not met, the EU has the power to delay progress and halt financial assistance. The EU uses this power to determine the process and nature of Europeanisation in that part of Europe. A case in point is the way the International Criminal Tribunal for Yugoslavia (ICTY) criteria have been adopted by the EU and the international community. Non-compliance with the ICTY has affected progress in the Association and Stabilisation process with Serbia and Montenegro and the start of accession talks with Croatia. Abiding by the ICTY rules is a significant part of the normative side of Europeanisation for these countries and signifies justice, recognition of past crimes, and reconciliation between neighboring states and ethnic communities. As a result, the EU's power to determine the course of bilateral relations with candidate countries is unrestricted. The EU uses a combination of carrots, sticks, and the promise of eventual membership to bring these countries closer to Europe. In 2003, the EU made a major symbolic step by adopting the European Partnerships with the Western Balkan countries as a more convincing and committed way to tie them to the process of accession. But the term 'partnership' between the EU and the

Western Balkans should not hide the fact that in reality the EU–South East European interaction is a one-way, didactic, and patronising process.⁹

By focusing on patterns of construction of memory(ies), space and transfers of knowledge and power in a ‘Europe that was /is not/ and is about to be’ sequence, as the Staro Sajmište story is being ‘uncovered’ to the public, we intend to explore the construction of narratives, public discourses and identities that directly impact democratic practice and citizenship in the wake of the radical social and political change that Serbia has experienced in the recent past and during the Western Balkans European Union accession process. The case is informed by understandings of the Balkans as a space that is inside and outside Europe in many senses, traversed by flows of people, funding, projects and ideas/imaginaries of Europe and European-ness, concretised in specific projects and in the relations that constitute them. There is a growing interaction between the ongoing integration of Europe and politics of memory, for the experience of the Second World War was constitutive for the development of the European Union, and spatial policies and practices. Exploring the Holocaust and Second World War public history and the concomitant memorialisation of past, illuminates to what extent and how nation-transcending ideas such as human rights and citizenship, assumingly part and parcel of Europeanisation, are exported, translated and become part of individual nation-states policies and practices in the Balkans.

South Eastern Europe and/or the Balkan region is itself ambiguous; regions being ‘relatively malleable entities contingent on various social practices’,¹⁰ in terms of the complex dynamic between notions of identity, nationhood and the spectre of (Western) Europe and its ‘Other’. At its most acute in terms of the frozen notion of ‘the Balkans’,¹¹ and only slightly more nuanced in terms of the EU’s construction of ‘the Western Balkans’, the region tends to be defined in negative terms and, in the 1990s, as essentially conflict-prone and underpinned by deep-rooted historical animosities. The difficulty of constructing an antithesis from within, in terms of ‘Balkan is beautiful’,¹² or, more mildly, South East Europe for itself, is reinforced by the real and imagined uneven geo-politics of accession to the European Union, itself constructed in terms of modernity as states seek to ‘join or rejoin Europe’. Our frame of reference needs to grasp both the heterogeneity of the spaces subsumed within the concept of South East Europe and the historically contingent processes of institution and (nation) state building, which may be relevant in terms of the concept of memory and in terms of the configurations and forms of international interventions.

A series of European Histories

Modernity comes to Serbia

Staro Sajmište (‘Old Fairgrounds’, in Serbian) was located in Semlin, the Austro-Hungarian border with the Ottoman Empire, facing the historical centre of Belgrade, while during the first Yugoslavia it hosted the Exhibition Fair of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes (1918–1941), a centre of modernity where the European nations erected beautiful pavilions less than a kilometre away from the central square of the city. A complex of buildings was built and opened in 1937, spreading over an area of 15,000 m², with modern and artistic buildings and constructions, including a high metal spike construction representing a showcase trade-fair and amusement venue built in the European monumental modernist

manner at the doorstep of the city. It hosted international fairs, with the task of promoting the economy of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia.

In Europe, the modern Exhibition, ‘the ultimate spectacle of an ordered totality’, made its debut in 1851 at London’s famed Great Exhibition of the *Works of Industry of All Nations*, at the Crystal Palace where ‘an ensemble of disciplines and techniques of display that had been developed within the previous histories of museums, panoramas, Mechanic’s Institute exhibitions, art galleries, and arcades’ were brought together and reordered so as to establish ‘a new pedagogic relation between state and people,’ to morally and culturally regulate, to exercise power and bring order – an assent to governance – by way of conveying messages, by allowing ‘people, en masse’ to see rather than be surveilled, ‘to become the subjects rather than the objects of knowledge’.¹³ Pred describes the ‘exhibition’, as

a public space designed to manufacture private desires; as a space suggesting an unlimited profusion of commodities: as a space where the commercial, the political and the cultural were ideologically melted together, as a space intensely projecting dominant meanings of modernity; as a space in which symbols of power were given condensed expression for manipulative or seductive purposes; as a space for the representation of grand claims; as a space of illusory and fantastic images, the space of such exhibitions was a precursor to the ‘society of the spectacle’, to the incessant ‘spectacle’ of merchandise marketing via television and other forms of communication encountered in private as well as public spaces.

By the early years of the twentieth century, international exhibitions had been held in Paris in 1855 and 1867, Vienna in 1873, Stockholm in 1897 and Glasgow in 1901. In this ‘montage of the present’, Pred argues that the educational exposure of exhibition visitors to the objective possibilities of new forms of consumption

was one with their exposure to representations that glorified domestic industrial achievements, that encouraged national pride, that sought to contribute to the further cultural construction of an ‘imagined community’, of a national identity based on shared symbols and sentiments, of a nationally oriented collective memory. At the same time, such exposure was one with an exposure to ideological articulations that linked industrial technology with continuous progress and a belief in an ever-better future, to ideological articulations that silently denied the wide-spread existence of domestic tensions and poverty, and thereby legitimated the present. Thus, the rhetorics of nationalism and progress were articulated with one another as well as with those of consumption.

Staro Sajmište in 1937–38 becomes very visible, from Belgrade and from Europe, and takes on the pedagogical role of teaching ‘modern seeing’ to early twentieth-century citizens of a European country.

Second World War and the Holocaust

During the Second World War, the location disappears from the public eye – Staro Sajmište is annexed by the Independent State of Croatia, in bed with Nazi Germany, and becomes a detention camp, a space of bare life, constituting symbolically a non-land, a void to be filled in.¹⁴

From autumn 1941 until mid 1942, the Sajmište camp – Judenlager Semlin – was a concentration site for Jewish and Roma women and children, mostly from Belgrade and the Banat, who died there, or, more often, in moving gas vans. Approximately 7000

people thus lost their lives, and occupied Serbia was proclaimed to be the first ‘judenfrei’ European territory. The website of the Shoah Resource Center, The International School for Holocaust Studies, writes:

Fairground site located in the Yugoslav town of Zemun, near Belgrade, which was used as an internment camp for some 8,000 Jews from Serbia before they were killed by gas van in the spring of 1942. During the fall of 1941, Wehrmacht firing squads murdered most of Serbia’s male Jews and gypsies. However, they had refused to shoot women and children. Thus, in December 1941 the Germans imprisoned the surviving Jews and Gypsies in Sajmište, mostly women and children but also some men, until such time when they could be deported to their deaths in extermination camps in Poland.¹⁵

On the website of the 2006 British Academy funded research project on the post-Second World War memorialisation of one of the main sites of the Holocaust in Nazi-occupied Serbia, ‘Semlin Judenlager – in Serbian public memory’,¹⁶ Jovan Byford explains that,

The destruction of Serbia’s Jewry involved two distinct phases. The first, which lasted between July and November 1941, involved the murder of Jewish men, who were shot as part of the retaliatory executions (*Geiselmordpolitik*) carried out by the forces of the Wehrmacht in response to acts of insurgency and sabotage. The second phase between December 1941 and May 1942 involved the incarceration of the women and children at the Semlin Judenlager in Belgrade and their gassing in a mobile gas van.¹⁷

Browning argues that Sajmište marked the escalation and utilisation of gas vans from then onwards by Nazis, while the swift extermination of Serbian Jews ‘presaged the efficiency and routinised detachment of the death camps’.⁴⁹

The Deutsche Welle website quote encapsulates the horror:

Staro Sajmište was not the only Nazi prison in German-occupied Belgrade, but it was the most hated. It was located so close to the city that, according to witnesses, one could hear prisoners’ screams wafting over the river.¹⁸

In 1944, Sajmište was hit by US bombers in raids, which killed 80 people at the camp and injured 170. The bombers’ intended target was the nearby railway station.¹⁹ According to Koljanin, the site became a transitory camp for partisan resistance fighters and disobedient civilians from Yugoslavia and the Balkans (Anhaltelager Semlin). About 40,000 men and women passed through the Anhaltlager during this period, of which more than 10,000 died from exhaustion, dysentery and beatings in the camp. Sajmište was finally shut down in September 1944.²⁰

Yugoslav politics of memory

After the Second World War, Yugoslav authorities turned the site over to local artists for use as studios. Several Roma families and descendants of the artists lived in shacks and trailers, while some companies had their offices on the premises. Former camp facilities, which survived Allied bombings, housed labour brigade members, artists’ studios and people with no adequate housing. Discourses from the ongoing discussion about the recent wars in former Yugoslavia, as well as the Second World War, further inform the story. In the Balkans, the Second World War had both the characteristics of a liberation

struggle and of a civil war. Yugoslavia actually liberated its territory with almost no foreign support, while at the same time it was a country that first had to legitimise the existence of a Yugoslav state, following a civil war between Ustascha, Partisans and Četniks. Tito's regime based the reconstruction of the country on the idea of 'brotherhood and unity' (Ref. 21, p. 32). The official narrative of the Second World War sought to emphasise the ethnic balance between victims and executioners. The anti-Fascist struggle played a key role for the resurrection of the common Yugoslav state. The memory of the common struggle became the founding myth. During the 1960s, controversies between Serbian and Croatian historians about each nation's 'share' in the war, the victory and in treason concluded the regulated post-war consent. The Holocaust was treated as a minor matter; the victims of 'Fascist' atrocities were rarely subdivided into different groups. Therefore, the specific and different ways of remembering the war became an element of political mobilisation in the late 1980s, when the ruling classes of various Yugoslav republics, determined to divide the country, started to use the memory of the war to stir up resentment for the evil suffered in the past, and raise the fear for its possible repetition.²² The skilful use of fear mobilised thousands of people to create 'war at home'²³ by turning against one another because of ethnic identity.

As Jovan Byford comments on the website 'Semlin Judenlager – in Serbian public memory',

The late 1980s were a time when the ideological motifs of 'brotherhood and unity', Titoism and the cult of 'the fallen hero of the People's Liberation War' gave way to a new, nationalist version of the past, which had at its core the story of the Serbs' collective martyrdom in the Independent State of Croatia. The gaze of Serbian historians and quasi-historians, politicians, church leaders and the media became fixated on the Ustasha concentration camp at Jasenovac, transforming it into the focal point of national memory. This ideological shift directly affected the remembrance of the Semlin camp, whose history came to be viewed through the prism of Serbian nationalism. Selective and ideologically motivated interpretations sought to assimilate the history of Serbia's largest concentration camp into the dominant narrative of Serbian suffering in Croatia. Thus, the fact that Semlin was formally on the territory of the Independent State of Croatia (NDH) came to be regarded as the most important fact about the camp's history.

Dealing with the Past: Marginalisation, Post-war Reconstruction and Human Rights

Staro Sajmište was centrally placed in urban planning throughout the Yugoslav times, situated between the historical city centre and the newly built administrative quarters of the socialist Novi Beograd/New Belgrade. Yet the location was marginal when it came to its historical and public prominence and value in local and national history. The location was proclaimed a 'Cultural Heritage of city of Belgrade' in 1987, and a monument was erected on 21 April 1995. The memorial status of the site was provisory since the only commemoration that took place until the mid 1980s was the erection of two secluded memorial plaques placed by local veteran and political organisations.

As early as in 1990, as the international community moved in and the Milosevic regime tried to maintain control, an initiative was put forward for Sajmište to be transformed into the site of the 'Serbian Yad Vashem', i.e. the Serbian equivalent of the

Holocaust memorial museum in Jerusalem. However, it was only in 1995 (after the Croatian forces captured Jasenovac, making it inaccessible to Serbian nationalists) that Sajmište became a central place for commemorating Serbian suffering in Croatia. Since the mid-1990s, annual commemorations of the Day of Remembrance for the Victims of Genocide (22 April) – which include an Orthodox Christian religious service in memory of (Orthodox) victims of genocide, followed by round-table discussions, lectures, book promotions or exhibitions devoted to Serbian martyrdom at Jasenovac – begin with a wreath-laying ceremony at Sajmište. These commemorative rituals, whose principal object of memory has been the genocide in Croatia, rather than the Holocaust in Nazi-occupied Serbia, contributed to the marginalisation of the Semlin Judenlager, whose tragic history remains excluded from public memory.

The experience of the Second World War was constitutive for the development of the European Union, and ‘the success of the community was based on consent to the division of Europe, with the consequence that the other half of the continent was written off, and, with the blessing of democracy, peace, and economic upturn, kept out.’²⁴ It was only with the unexpected collapse of the Soviet empire that eastern Europe re-entered the European Union’s expanded political horizon, while the collapse of the official doctrine sparked off a heated controversy about the interpretation of their own histories. Looking back at the Holocaust and dealing with its most immediate consequences proved to be complicated endeavour in post-war Europe, as national priorities, anti-Semitism, the Cold War, and a multitude of local conflicts and interests complicated and even impeded the return of surviving Jews in the places they were expelled from. Furthermore, Europe’s collective memory after 1989 is just as diverse as its nations and cultures and as divided as its national and social world. Assuming that memory could be regulated via official acts of state or routinised commemorative rituals, a precondition for the solidarity of the extended EU would be the development of a historical consciousness that accommodates the new members appropriately, and involves them in the wider debate. According to Leggewie, ‘anyone who wishes to give a European society a political identity will rate the discussion and recognition of disputed memories just as highly as treaties, a common currency and open borders’.²⁵

Based on the analysis of public and official discourse, the research project ‘Europeanization of National Memory Spaces’²⁶ indicated the emergence of memory forms that transcend the nation-state context and complement it with a Europe-wide realm of collective memory. This transformation is marked by the blurring of memories of self and other; that is, the previously separated narratives of victims and perpetrators are frequently harmonised through an emphasis on a witness perspective. While the nation-state loses dominance, it by no means becomes obsolete. Rather, collective memory is now situated in a context of de-nationalised memories and attempts at re-nationalisation. The new East European culture of remembrance of communism²⁵ was mirrored during the 2000s in the public narratives of Serb suffering under communism. Michael Rothberg’s work²⁷ offers interesting insights, suggesting the need to think about European memory across both the axes of Nazi wartime trauma and anti-colonial struggles, both occurring contemporaneously in the late 1940s and 1950s and implicating one another through the works of Arendt and Césaire.

The case of the Staro Sajmište story also impacts upon and is intrinsically related to perceptions, policies and practices of citizenship, nationality and belonging; that is, the ways subjects relate to power. The collapse of so-called socialism and rise of national conflicts, seen as the reason for the de-articulation of the institutions and the state in the Central and Eastern European countries brought to the fore of the European agenda the issue of monitoring and implementation of human rights. The problem of stateness emerged as crucial for the success or failure of the reforms essential for EU membership, for institutional reconstruction became the necessary condition for these countries' integration to the European, international and increasingly globalised division of labour. This has been a European story all along; the emergence of human rights and more particularly minority protection in Europe, imported in other parts of the world from this continent is exemplified by the formation of the minority phenomenon within the framework of the constitutive reflection of European modernity, namely the fundamental principles of the liberal political philosophy and legal theory, international law protection of minority rights and the history of European international relations from the seventeenth century until today, as well as the different shapes that minority phenomena have taken in Europe through ethno-national and religious claims and the strategy of the European institutions such as the European Union, the Council of Europe and the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe. The Treaty of Westphalia validated the existence of minorities on the European continent, while for the first time the protection of religious minorities was included in the new, 'modern' European order of the seventeenth century. The Congress of Vienna (1815) certified the transition from the protection of religious difference to becoming a member of a nationally identified minority. The implementation of the principle of nationalities led to the historical appearance of national minorities on the newborn European national territories, as part and parcel of international relations in Europe. The legal experience of the inter-war period (1919–1939) with its special focus on the so-called 'minority treaties' of the League of Nations, as well as the whole minority protection system established, actually the first one ever in international law focusing on minority rights, exemplifies the origin and the ambivalence of the nationalities principle which, while liberating some nations, turned others to minorities. The end of the Second World War brought in an international order – under the auspices of the United Nations – where the very term 'minority' was rejected, since protection of minorities by keen states was, to a certain extent, regarded as the Second World War reason or pretext. Thereafter, international law focused on simple human rights based on the principle of non-discrimination, a prevalent perception characterising many defenders of such 'post-modern' aspects of belonging, from the establishment of the United Nations until the end of Cold War.

The post Cold War minority protection is presented as a European ideology based on three pillars. The 'normative' one, which presents minority rights as human ones. This is mainly the approach of the Council of Europe, namely of the Framework Convention for the protection of national minorities. The second pillar regards minority religions and languages as an integral part of the European cultural heritage, which deserves to be safeguarded. Here, the European Charter for Minority and Regional languages is the main legal tool. Finally, the third ideological pillar is based on the assumption that

minority protection is a means of conflict prevention – protecting groups is achieving peace. This is the approach of the OSCE High Commissioner on national minorities. Citizenship, otherwise nationality, is the legal bond of public law proving a membership to a state. The presentation of the main modes of citizenship acquisition as well as the main modes of its loss demonstrates the fundamental controversies related to integration and exclusion within European state tradition and administrative practice. Who is entitled to be and who deserves not to be a citizen is revealingly answered by the way modern states use citizenship acquisition and loss in order to construct their political community according to their national ideals and values.²⁸

The Yugoslav tradition differed. The citizenship of citizens in the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia was bifurcated into a federal citizenship and a citizenship of their particular republic, while republican citizenship did not have any practical consequences. Since federal citizenship was a strong guarantor of the rights of citizens living outside of their native republics, residence became the most important factor in the everyday life of Yugoslavs and also stimulated the free movement of people.²⁹ For more than four decades, the benefits of Yugoslav citizenship established personal and family ties across republican borders, whereas economically motivated migrations and the resettlement of federal administration personnel resulted in a considerable number of individuals living outside, and even very far, from their republic of origin; it also led to a certain degree to the modification of ethno-demographic balances in the Yugoslav republics. Legislators in the successor states deliberately neglected the actual situation on the ground at the moment of disintegration and, once the protective federal roof disappeared over their heads, ‘internal’ migrants became the first to suffer the consequences. Federal citizenship was invalidated and republican citizenship became the only strong criterion for the acquisition of new citizenship. Almost all successor states of the former Yugoslav federation – with some variation according to their specific context – have used their respective citizenship laws as an effective tool for nation-building and ethnic engineering.³⁰ Thus, the ‘claims’ of different actors for exclusivity of the Staro Sajmište story, based on narratives of suffering and violations of human rights, resonates well with the politics promoted by the European Union since the break up of Yugoslavia.

Dealing with space: Sanitising and business as usual

At the same time, the attention towards the treatment of Holocaust sites across Europe, fostered by a network of transnational organisations that facilitate genocide memorial culture, sparked the focusing of attention onto the Staro Sajmište story. The local response of city officials and cultural elites to the recognition of the embarrassing commercial activities taking place in the remaining camp facilities in Belgrade was swift.

The Associated Press writes on the position of the local authorities in October 2007:

Belgrade authorities said they can do nothing about the rock concerts which are now held inside a circular hall topped with a brick tower that used to be the camp’s hospital, because the building has been sold to a private entrepreneur.

‘It is awful that such concerts are being held there, but the building was illegally sold’ by the capital’s previous authorities, said New Belgrade mayor Zeljko Ozegovic. ‘We have been appealing the legality of the purchase for years.’

Poseydon, the company that bought the hall, says the concerts simply make business sense.³¹

A look at how the Serbian media presented the debate on the Staro Sajmište case can offer insights in the representations of the nation and minorities negotiated, as well as exploring how the selective recollection and politically motivated interpretation of past events in public discourse are influenced by the perceived needs of all sides to maintain unity and legitimise their positions in an ongoing dispute. In short: how do politicians and the media use the memory of the past in order to support political positions today? There are multiple reports as to how such a site could have been transformed into an entertainment area:

At the exhibition centre Poseidon, apart from concerts, fashion shows and exhibitions are held as well. Owners stated that they have asked authorities of the city and the Municipality a couple of times, in order to get directions for their program but they never got any reply.

They also say that they know very well the history of the place where their premises are and that they intend to put a memorial plate on their own.

‘We don’t do anything which could be against the developmental direction of the city. We are amongst the founders of Old Fairgrounds Memorial, the association that is involved in the revitalisation of cultural monuments and the revitalisation of the Old Fairgrounds area’, explained Nenad Krsmanović from Poseidon.³²

Furthermore, in November 2007, a fight for the boxing world championship re-promoted the old dispute about the Old Fairgrounds:

Explaining why the boxing match has been held last night on the Old Fairgrounds, the organiser, Aleksandar Nikacevic, told us that he and his team found out the terms only 20 days before the match and at that moment all the other halls had been already booked, and so they have chosen the hall of the Old Fairgrounds.

...

In mid November the Ministry of Culture, recalled an Article 32 of the Law on cultural goods, which states that cultural goods should not be used for purposes that are not in accordance with its nature, purpose and importance. The law also defines fines for those who violate this provision.³³

Belgrade officials and elites promptly announced the future establishment of a memorial and museum complex in Staro Sajmište and overall regulation of the area. Staro Sajmište with its surrounding urban parcels remains one of last undeveloped spaces in central Belgrade that is conveniently placed on the Sava river bank. The construction boom is guided by the profit-oriented goals of private financiers, local and foreign, who place large amounts of capital into construction projects in Belgrade. Within the context of European integration, public perception of the Sajmište camp in Serbia shifted gradually more towards the image of Sajmište as primarily a Holocaust site (a perception already dominant in foreign academic and cultural circles) than as a ‘fascist terror site’, as it was usually perceived previously.

As Aleksandar Lebl, journalist, a former member of the Rab Jewish battalion and president of the Commission for Monitoring Anti-Semitism (Federation of Jewish Communities in Serbia-Montenegro), says in an interview:

The question of who owns the land in Staro Sajmište remains unclear as issues of ownership of the land are important all over Serbia during this period of de-nationalisation of property, especially of religious properties. According to the 2002 census about 1,800 Jews remain in Belgrade today, while religious practices are held in Belgrade, Subotica and Novi Sad. The media speak only about Staro Sajmište whereas there were four Nazi concentration camps in Belgrade, while most editors have no clear idea about what happened during the WWII. Holocaust history became only recently part of the Serbian mainstream history. For example, only one paragraph in the third-grade school textbook contains a note on the Holocaust.³⁴

Museums are sites where links between memory and history are created, in such a way that the sub-group that initiates the memory aspires, using a unique narrative, for its past to be transformed into the individual memory of each visitor.³⁵ The question arises as to whom does the unique narrative belong: the victimised group, the nation as a whole? And how does a victimised group negotiate its inclusion in the official narrative? Narratives of the past thus become relevant both for understanding the present and for internalising recommended ways of coping with it.³⁶ Actors and perspectives deemed undesirable by the political elite are unwelcome in state-budgeted museums.³⁷ Survivors of the destroyed communities sponsor and plan monuments, as confirmed in the article ‘In Belgrade, man wants memorial to a “forgotten concentration camp”’:

‘We want to return the site to the way it looked when it opened in 1935, with the Holocaust Museum as the central feature as a monument to Serbian Jews who died in the Holocaust. Just as other former concentration camps in Europe have been converted into memorials so this should be too,’ says Masic, one of 30 volunteers, both Jewish and non-Jewish, in the memorial association.

Slavko Maksimovic, the association’s secretary, estimates that the first phase of the project would cost at least \$2.5 million. ‘We want to turn this into a lasting memorial to the people who died and to the suffering all those kept here endured,’ he says. ‘It will take time but we hope that the central building, the Holocaust Museum, could open within two or three years.’

The site could also eventually house a theatre, a museum about Belgrade, a hotel and a school of music and fine arts.

...

Davor Salom, secretary of the Federation of Jewish Communities in Serbia and Montenegro, renamed following the disintegration of Yugoslavia as a country, says the Sajmiste project will be an important contribution to the memory process.

‘We are forgetting the Holocaust too quickly, and this Holocaust Museum and the reminder of what this site was will help fulfil our obligation to the memory of thousands of Serbian Jews and millions of Jews worldwide who were killed during World War II,’ he says.³⁸

Of particular interest are the recent civil society initiatives in fostering the creation of a Staro Sajmište memorial site, its inclusion in the international relevant fora and networks and in

attributing to a historical event that shaped the history of Belgrade, Serbia and Europe, a space in the national narrative, as well as in the European historical narrative on the Holocaust and Yugoslavia, such as the one undertaken by the Serbian media company B92, itself an instrumental NGO in the fall of Milosevic and the ‘democratisation’ of the country, which collected documentation, created a website as an open space for communication and a three part documentary. Since 2007, the media B92 led a campaign where the concept of a ‘multifunctional centre’ emerged, a proposal for a museum centre that would include a number of institutions, like the Los Angeles ‘Tolerance Museum’, as well as a range of other cultural and historical sites within the city. One of the founders and presently Director of the media, Veran Matic, emphasised in an interview³⁹ that the creation of a memorial is a question of political will, and that the city municipality of New Belgrade, which in the beginning offered to provide space, later maintained that 40 square meters were given to a café, possibly because of the strength of the developers’ lobby influencing the Belgrade Council. He maintains that this has to be a state project, but it appears that the Serbian government wants it to be a Museum of Genocide against the Serbs, while the Jewish community wants a Holocaust museum, and there are different approaches also museologically. The B92 Staro Sajmište documentary project is part of an initiative to create a Memorial space for Tolerance, which could be included in a wider route of Belgrade historical and cultural monuments in the centre of the city, including the Museum of Modern Art. It would be a living space with 30% given over to a permanent exhibition and 70% to temporary exhibitions, an education space also for Yugoslavia and the Western Balkans, open to schools, reconstructing memory so as to draw lessons from it. According to Matic, the project would learn from how the Germans faced their past, and from other international experiences, constituting an educational space where ‘different kinds of history’ will be established, different from the present one, based on facts and figures, and not ‘a genocide museum of skulls, of how Serbs are brave and have a wish to die’.

Furthermore, according to Matic, the pavilions, such as the Italian and Turkish ones, would be re-established so as to form a space ‘where people will be allowed to see, compare and contrast and form their own opinion’, thus becoming part of the wider project ‘Independent for the Truth’. Together with the radio station, website, and video production unit, this project is part of the earlier B92 initiatives until 2000 on reconciliation, which included one conference in Ulcinj and two conferences in Belgrade. Several voices in Serbia coming from the 1990s anti-war movement, navigating tenaciously today the waters of democratisation and Europeanisation, support the creation of memorial sites, including civil society actors such as the Belgrade Circle.⁴⁰ One reads in their proposal a point on National Days of Remembrance:

Following the initial phase of transition, a painful past may be reaffirmed in the long-run through national days of remembrance, the construction of museums and commemorative monuments, and the incorporation of this tragic history into the curriculum of the nation’s system of education. Our capitols could become the ‘cities of collective memory’, the knot of urban pressure and constant insistence that crimes should never be forgotten. Ritual remembrance through public statues and memorial centers, street names, names of city squares and/or public buildings should enable the victims to penetrate into the public sphere of the collective memory.⁴¹

Yet, the red line of all such proposals was bluntly set at the 2008 Belgrade Salon of Architecture, where ‘the thematic exposition of Staro Sajmište reconstruction plans exhibited projects of several authors to whom a specific approach was suggested – as Belgrade daily Blic reports in its April 22nd issue, the authors were advised by the organisers to bear in mind that “the memory of those who lost their lives there should be present, but it should not be dominant.”’⁴²

In practice though, everything is, more or less, business as usual, as Radovic suggests, ‘while the only noticeable novelty is the mammoth shopping mall built hundred meters away from former camp pavilions – the transitional consumerist city is inevitably approaching the historic site’. The urban space is becoming increasingly sanitised; following pressure by the EU-led initiatives, the Romas – who were, until recently, living in deplorable conditions in the Staro Sajmište settlement, underneath the Gazela bridge – were moved out. Only in October 2008 did the city authorities set up 87 containers, donated by the city of Essen and the Caritas organisation, at a new site, which is designated for the construction of apartments for socially endangered groups, as the city gets cleaner and closer to Europe.

A travelling story and agency revisited

The story of a Second World War concentration camp and of a banned concert travelled through Serbia and around the world; a local event was reinterpreted by international activists, journalists and bloggers in different sites. At the same time, Staro Sajmište became a ‘travelling story’ about European narratives on violence, memory, history and the state, while the very place of destruction and reconstruction is subject to different interests, desires, and realities, as multiple and contra dictionary ‘truths’ are negotiated.

The international media reported on Staro Sajmište on different, yet related grounds and occasions, from a variety of standpoints, as newspapers, television channels, radio, and the internet are today constituted by a network of transnational companies and relations while national news-making traditions have become intertwined into a global news reporting culture. The Associated Press reports, almost immediately after the concert case in an article published on the web on 1 November 2007, which echoes an article carried on the website ‘Our Jerusalem’ already on 27 March 2003, entitled ‘In Belgrade, man wants memorial to a “forgotten concentration camp”’,³⁸

The capital’s downtown area is located on the eastern side of the Sava, about 200 yards from the prewar fair grounds. Since World War II, new Belgrade has spread across the river and developers consider the Sajmiste site prime real estate.

‘It was the only death camp in Europe which was so visible,’ said Masic, 88, who wants to build a proper memorial to the victims of what he describes as ‘the forgotten concentration camp.’

‘The intention was to intimidate the Serb population by letting them see what was going on inside the camp,’ he said. ‘For our small nation, the Sajmiste camp was as horrendous as Dachau or Sachsenhausen in Germany’.⁴⁴

By reactivating the story in virtual present space, the web, the B92 media project communicated a forgotten story of a space of exception in the past, where Jews and

Romas, nationalists and communists perished, and which at present is a site of prime real estate development and, until recently, home to a marginalised Roma community. Social configurations, even unexpectedly, have become significantly more heterogeneous, combining local historical, spatial and political factors with economic and political elements of broader amplitude as the booming city of Belgrade increasingly becomes a kind of space where the national is becoming denationalised through the material and discursive practices of a growing variety of actors, from global firms to EU versed consultants and policy makers.

The process of the Western Balkans integration into the European Union seems not to be only regulated by the official Stabilisation and Association Process (Sap), bilateral agreements between national governments and unilateral efforts by states, but it is also heavily influenced by the presence and involvement of a multitude of actors. South East Europe is an extremely rich space of emerging transnational governmentality, of human rights discourse and of EU influence. Crucial issues of changing governance, the uncritical importation of models, processes of sub-contracting, reflexivity, accountability together pointed to critical possibilities, practices and policies. The role of intermediaries and interlocutors, which is assumed to be reflexive of the crucial process of new scalarities, specialities and sociality, new forms of governmentalities, power and compliance, discursive practices and knowledge systems, is still to be investigated. Reforms are cut across by a wider 'democratisation' discourse in which actors in civil society are positioned in a variety of seemingly contradictory positions vis-à-vis the state: as partners; as innovators; as sub-contracted alternative service providers; as critics of state authoritarianism; as policy advocates; and as empowerers of the oppressed and under-privileged.

Conclusions

The multiple (hi)stories and fractured mnemonic genealogies of Staro Sajmište produce – and are themselves produced by – the narrative of European participation and integration, in an interplay between different discursive layers, such as the national narrative, the international and European narrative and the local Jewish narrative, as well as practices of spatial reconstruction and consumerism.

This paper argues that it is only through a varied memorial landscape that the multiplicity of divided memory can be reflected, particularly in light of the large number and variety of interest groups, shifting political agendas, the demands of the market, the real estate, construction and tourist industries and frictions between majorities and minorities. It thus questions the purpose and validity of plans to create a centralised memorial to the camp and its victims. A state memorial and/or museum embodies social power, the ability to reflect, represent, and shape the past, while creating from it a political agenda for the present. And when state museums cannot be opened as a result of the inability to compromise between the struggles, narratives, and perceptions of the whole range of political sub-cultures, it is a case of reflecting society's political culture, disputes, lack of consensus, and unwillingness to reach compromise and a consensual formulation.⁴⁵

The perspective of 'cosmopolitan memory',^{50,51} discusses the Holocaust's adoption and commemoration outside of Germany and Europe, serving as the basis for a global

human rights culture, and as a node of consensus for progressive politics. Levy and Sznajder⁵¹ suggest that one of the hallmarks of cosmopolitan memory is the ‘deterritorialisation’ of memory. Despite its obvious centrality, the location of Staro Sajmište also indicates a certain ambiguity. Exactly because of its history, as a modernist exhibition public space in the beginning of the twentieth century, as a land of exception during the Second World War, and a space of brotherhood and unity amnesia in post-Second World War Yugoslavia – a county itself belonging between the East and the West, a territorial space that was effectively left outside of the construction of the Cold War and after European geography – Staro Sajmište effectively remains a land that belonged to, and was identified with, no one. In part, it is because of the former and present emptiness of the space, and the particularly disjointed geography of contemporary Belgrade, that the space can be given over to memorialisation and/or to potential exhibition usage as a shopping mall.

Andreas Huyssen⁵² described the cross-cutting migrations of memory across national boundaries as the ‘globalisation of memory works’ and the ‘transnational movement of memory discourses’ (Ref. 52, pp. 13, 14). He focuses on how the Holocaust comes to function as an umbrella signifier, on how tropes and rhetorical figures that may have initially emerged in Holocaust discourse migrate into other narratives of historical atrocity and oppression (Ref. 52, p. 98).

In *The Human Condition*,⁴⁶ Hannah Arendt conceives of the public realm as a space produced by particular forms of citizen interaction, where citizens are willing to engage in the risk and unpredictability of mutual self-disclosure, benefitting from the self-discovery that comes through interaction with previously unknown others, and solidifying the bonds between citizens that produce and sustain a space for this public form of interaction. As Clarke reminds us, people always live with/in and against particular governmentalities which always enter ‘national-popular formations’ only in and through alliances, ‘assemblages of political discourses which inevitably change, shape, and produce hybrids, paradoxes, tensions and incompatibilities’ rather than ‘coherent implementations of a unified discourse and plan’.⁵³ Jones’ notion of ‘multi-scalar networks’ which ‘link local and trans-local processes’⁵⁴ producing, consolidating and challenging social constructions of place, appears more useful and open. Such processes influence most importantly issues of belonging and citizenship. As Aihwa Ong⁵⁵ writes, mutations in citizenship are crystallised in an ever-shifting landscape shaped by the flows of markets, technologies, and populations, as the elements of citizenship (rights, entitlements, etc) are becoming disarticulated from each other, and becoming re-articulated with universalising criteria of neoliberalism and human rights. Such ‘global assemblages’, even of memory, define zones of political entitlements and claims. Furthermore, the space of the ‘assemblage’, rather than the national terrain, becomes the site for political mobilisations by diverse groups in motion. Particular constellations shape specific problems and resolutions to questions of contemporary living, further disarticulating and deterritorialising aspects of citizenship.

The political nature of Staro Sajmište, throughout its history, is also defined by the lived experience of those who did not ‘count’ in the past and the present, and are therefore not accounted for within the formal system of representation inaugurated by

state-centred democratic projects. A politics of seeing (and being seen) is at stake here, one which draws on the insight that politics at the margins and borders of territorial forms of re-presentation, such as a concentration camp or an externally bordered Europe, occur within an ‘imperceptible’ realm, outside formal regulation.⁴⁷ The memory of such politics needs recuperating in order to re-think Europe’s desire to re-mould its contiguous ‘outsides’ through the spreading of distinctly ‘European’ values to its Eastern and Southern ‘neighbours’.⁴⁸ At the same time, the link between EU integration and politics of memory poses the question: what is it about the former that specifically triggers the need for the latter? It might be possible to argue that the ‘problem of Europe’ remains the ‘problem of the Jew’, in the sense that the ‘Jewish Question’ provided the last opportunity to think of space in pan-European terms, and that the fight against anti-Semitic racism in the Second World War was the last chance to think of Europe on the grounds of anti-fascist ‘solidarity’ (from the Spanish Civil War through to Nuremberg).

In this sense, public space has played a specific historical, as well as material role, as a site of contradiction particular to the modern European nation-state form. A European open, ‘exhibition’ public space, industrially regimented by divisions of labour, gave way to a ‘social space’ whose spatio-temporal (dis)orderings were accompanied by the wartime ‘correction’ of the ‘detention camp’. Europe’s Second World War, Cold War and (into the recent period) public spaces of an increasingly successful, integrated and borderless market, whether exhibitions grounds, malls and concentration and exclusion camps, have, at least since the period of mid-nineteenth century monopoly capitalism and late imperialist expansion, served as a means to overcome class-based fissures within states, as well as resolving traumas flowing from internal border disputes and inter-imperial rivalries between core European nations, particularly at its outer seams, such as the Balkans and the Eastern Mediterranean post colony.

Yet, in a public space understood as synonymous with the heterogeneity, spontaneity and open-ended qualities of social interactions, where everyday localised activities have the capacity to produce temporary public forums that enable and encourage substantively public relationships among citizens, it would be possible to think about participatory, face-to-face, forms of citizenship. Public or common space, from this perspective, is not a pre-existing or institutionally-produced container that delineates who participates and how they do so, but instead remains an unfinished project open to contestation and revision through confrontation with previously unrecognised perspectives and identities, both in the case of Europe and in the story of Staro Sajmište.

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