Who Will Remember (for) Us? Mothers of Srebrenica, the Srebrenica Memorial Center, and the Future of Women's Memory

By
Jasmina Ejubović

Submitted to
Central European University
Department of Gender Studies

In partial fulfilment of the requirements for the Erasmus Mundus Master's Degree in Women's and Gender Studies (GEMMA)

Main Supervisor: Elissa Helms (Central European University)

Second supervisor: Izabela Desperak (University of Lodz)

Vienna, Austria

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Approval signed by the main Supervisor, Elissa Helms

AUTHOR'S DECLARATION

I, the undersigned, **Jasmina Ejubović**, candidate for the BA/MA/MSc/PhD degree in gender studies, declare herewith that the present thesis titled "Who Will Remember (for) Us? Mothers of Srebrenica, the Srebrenica Memorial Center, and the Future of Women's Memory" is exclusively my own work, based on my research and only such external information as properly credited in notes and bibliography. I declare that no unidentified and illegitimate use was made of the work of others, and no part of the thesis infringes on any person's or institution's copyright.

I also declare that no part of the thesis has been submitted in this form to any other institution of higher education for an academic degree, except as part of the co-tutelle agreement between Central European University Private University and University of Lodz.

I further declare that the following word count for this thesis are accurate:

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Vienna, 28th May 2025 Jasmina Ejubović

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Abstract

This research examines the future of the memory of women's experiences and roles in the context of the Srebrenica genocide, BiH. The Srebrenica genocide is a case of gendered genocide in which men were killed and women were forcefully displaced. The latter organized huge protests and founded the Mothers' Association to advocate for investigation, justice, and peace. Therefore, the special focus is put on the Mothers' Association and the Memorial Center Srebrenica, investigating in which ways the memory of the role and activism of the Mothers in the aftermath of the war could be preserved. While scholars have explored the genocide's gendered dimensions and the Memorial Center's memorialization practices, the role of the Mothers as memory-makers remains underexamined. Drawing on ethnographic research conducted in Srebrenica, this thesis explores how and to what extent the activism and agency of the Mothers are remembered and potentially institutionalized in a post-survivor future. Through interviews with Mothers and the Center's employees, the thesis analyzes a gap between the essentialist societal image of the sorrowful, helpless Mothers and their historically transformative role in the aftermath of war. The findings highlight differences between lived and institutional memory, discussing the absence of women's agency in the victim-centered narrative in the Memorial Center.

The significance of this research is in its future-oriented approach: it asks what happens to the memory of women's roles and experiences in the genocide after the generation of the Mothers is gone, underlying that the institutionalization of women's memory is critical to challenging patriarchal narratives of the war. Ultimately, this study calls for urgent strategies to preserve the complex legacy of the Mothers, as political actors who shaped the memory of Srebrenica within and beyond Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Acknowledgements

To the Mothers and the employees of the Memorial Center who agreed to participate in my research, thank you. Without you, this would not have been possible. I am especially grateful to the Mothers for their hospitality during my stay. I learned so much from you and gained a deeper understanding of the struggles Bosniak returnees face today. Hvala Vam.

To my supervisor, Dr. Elissa Helms—thank you for your unwavering support and guidance throughout the thesis-writing process. I have learned so much from you, and your mentorship has enriched not only this research but my own understandings of Bosnia, feminism, and women's struggles in the Balkans. I am forever indebted to you for everything I have learned.

To my second reader, Dr. Izabela Desperak—your kindness and thoughtfulness during my writing process meant a great deal to me. Your feedback and encouragement significantly helped improve my analysis. Thank you.

To my parents, family, and friends—thank you for your constant support during this period and for always believing in me. You have been an inexhaustible source of motivation.

A special thank you goes to the women in my family—from my sister and mother to my grandmothers. My mother was unable to study because of the war. My grandmothers were not even allowed to attend high school. They all made tremendous sacrifices so that my sister and I could pursue higher education today. This is the first MA degree on both sides of my family, and I feel both proud and saddened by that fact.

Finally, I thank God for all the blessings and privileges that have shaped me into the person I am today.

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List of Abbreviations

Bosna – Bosnia and Herzegovina

Center – Memorial Center Srebrenica–Potočari

Federation – Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina

ICMP – International Commission on Missing Persons

ICTY – International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia

JNA – Yugoslav National Army

Mothers' Association – Association "Movement of Mothers from Srebrenica and Žepa Enclaves"

MPI – Missing Persons Institute of Bosnia and Herzegovina

OHR – Office of the High Representative

RS – Republika Srpska

SDA – Party of Democratic Action

SFRY – Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia

INTRODUCTION

Growing up in Bosnia-Herzegovina, every July 11th, my family would watch the live broadcast of the funeral in Potočari and a program marking the anniversary of the genocide committed in Srebrenica. My father often participated in the Peace March, tracing the escape route of some of the survivors,[2] so it was interesting for me to sit in front of the screen and wait to see if a camera would catch him. I didn't understand much about it, except for how my mother explained to me that innocent people were killed there by the Chetniks who attacked us (Bosniaks) during the war. Formal education did not complete my picture of the war at all. I only had my mother's teenage experiences as a window into that period. During high school and my bachelor's studies, I tried to fill that gap through reading and informal ways of learning. It was only in my third year of university that I had the opportunity to take the course Studies of Genocide, taught by Professor Emir Suljagić, a genocide survivor and director of the Srebrenica-Potočari Memorial Center, where I learned what formal education and the culture of remembrance had failed to explain. However, an eye-opening moment for me and a motivation for my master's thesis topic was Suljagić's speech at the Heroines of Srebrenica Conference, held on July 10th, 2022, that discussed the role of women in the aftermath of genocide. I was in my parents' living room during summer break, watching it on TV, when I was intrigued by Suljagić's speech. Among other things, he said: “No one ever had to collect a body from five mass graves, as our mothers had to and as we had to (...)

[2] Annual peace walk in BiH organized in memory of victims. It lasts 3 days and participants are walking through the infamous route of “death” through which Bosniak survivors tried to reach territory controlled by the Army of the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Participants go in the opposite direction, towards Potočari, arriving on the evening of July 10, the night before the funeral and commemoration. Every year, the march gathers a couple of thousand participants.

All those 'heroes' who are today celebrated in caves were not sent to prison by the Vatican, the Comintern, or an international conspiracy. These women sent them to prison. They thought that they would be silent. They thought our women would keep quiet. But they are the ones who sent them to prison."[3] (VideoArhiv, 2022). At that moment, I realized that I knew nothing about *who* the initiators of the investigations were after the war, and that I thought proving and marking the genocide was an unquestionable, normal sequence of events after the war. Born five years after the end of it and watching the funeral broadcast on TV since childhood, I never thought about who was responsible for all this, and I assumed that those big, important men in suits did all of that, including putting criminals behind bars. The 'Mothers' of Srebrenica existed in my mind as an image of crying, helpless women over the graves of their loved ones. Only after Suljagić's words did I begin to doubt the accuracy of that image. As a young feminist, I was constantly fed up with the idea that our women were stuck powerless in patriarchy, while some other women out there, in that promising and wonderful West, had autonomy, something called *agency,* a word that doesn't exist in our vocabulary. I started digging, reading, and asking questions. Only then did I realize who those we call 'Mothers of Srebrenica' are and their role in the history of the aftermath of the war. The existing narrative in Bosniak society about Mothers is that of helpless victims. Although they are still active even today, this image persists in society. As older female survivors are slowly dying, the question arises of preserving the memory of their activism and experiences, as well as continuing their mission in the future.

Historical Context

The collapse of the former Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRY) is considered one of the bloodiest in modern history, and its consequences are still felt in its former republics today.

[3] The translation of the speech, as well as of the interview excerpts in this thesis, is my own.

However, contrary to the popular myth of "ancient hatred" and barbaric Balkans killing each other, the history of the 1990s in the Balkans is much more complex. Since my topic revolves around the memory of genocide in Srebrenica, I will briefly introduce the reader to the war years before genocide was committed in July 1995. In April 1992, after Bosnia and Herzegovina declared independence from SFRY, Serbian nationalists, with the resources and capacities of the former Yugoslav National Army (JNA), transformed into Serbian army, attacked Bosnia and Herzegovina by besieging its capital Sarajevo and forcibly expelling the non-Serb population from the areas of Eastern Bosnia (Podrinje), Krajina and Posavina (Pejanović, 2012, 19). In response to the attack, on May 15, the Army of the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina was formed, which for the next three years fought against Serb military and paramilitary formations despite the enormous inequality caused by the JNA military resources being seized by the Serbs and the UN declaring an embargo on sending weapons to the Bosnian Army, composed primarily of Bosniaks but also of Serbs and Croats and all those who considered Bosnia[4] their homeland (Bećirević, 2014). Between 1992 and 1995, several episodes of ethnic cleansing were committed, infrastructure and cultural heritage were destroyed, and Bosnia irretrievably lost about a million inhabitants, partly through migration, partly through persecution and killings. After many failed peace negotiations, the Dayton Interim Peace Accords were signed in Paris on December 14, 1995, under the leadership of the U.S (Holbrooke, 1998). Dayton marked the official ceasefire and the establishment of the internationally recognized state of Bosnia and Herzegovina with one of the most complex political systems in the world. The country is divided into two entities: the Republika Srpska (RS), with a predominantly Serb population (49% of territory), and the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (51%), with a primarily Bosniak and Croat population,

[4] I use Bosnia as a shortcut for Bosnia and Herzegovina throughout the thesis.

which is further divided into ten cantons as smaller administrative units. It also established the Office of the High Representative, known as the OHR, to represent the "international community" and monitor compliance with the Dayton Peace Accords in Bosnia and Herzegovina (Pehar, 2019). During the war, military units of the Republika Srpska, the then "Republic of the Serbian People of Bosnia and Herzegovina," proclaimed on January 9, 1992 (Džananović, Medić, & Karčić, 2025), committed several episodes of ethnic cleansing, primarily in the territory of Eastern Bosnia, of which the final and culminating episode in Srebrenica in July 1995 was judicially proven and recognized as genocide. A small border town, Srebrenica, became a refuge for thousands of displaced civilians fleeing Serb attacks, being declared a "safe zone" in 1993 by the UN Security Council under Resolution 819 (1993). However, although civilians relied on 150 Dutch peacekeepers, part of UNPROFOR, their presence proved useless when Bosnian Serb forces took control of the enclave on 11 July 1995 and massacred over 8,000 men and boys in the following days, forcefully displacing women and children. The International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) later declared this act to be genocide (Yugoslavia, 2004).[5] The UN's failure to protect civilians in the safe zone became a controversial issue, particularly in the Netherlands, which was later sued by survivors for complicity in genocide.

The nature of the crime of the Srebrenica massacre consisted of moving bones from primary to secondary and, sometimes, even tertiary graves (Huffine, Crews, & Davoren, 2007, 432). Today, in 2025, many mass graves are still to be located, and more than a thousand victims have not been identified and buried in Potočari, or their skeletons have been partially found. The discovery of

[5] ICTY did not find other episodes of ethnic cleansing during the war to be genocide, only crimes against humanity. Many Bosnian scholars are starting to challenge this perception that genocide only took place in Srebrenica, but rather argue it was its culmination point. Edina Bećirević's book *Genocide on the Drina River* argues that genocide was committed in Eastern Bosnia in an episodic manner (Bećirević, 2014). Throughout the thesis, I will echo the arguments of Bosnian scholars like Bećirević and perceive the Srebrenica genocide as a final episode in genocide in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

tertiary graves was a phenomenon for forensic scientists that had never been encountered before Srebrenica (Jugo & Wastell, 2015, 151). The Srebrenica genocide represents the first and largest systematic and scientifically substantiated case of the application of DNA analysis to identify victims of a genocide (Wagner, 2008). Every year on July 11, the official anniversary of the genocide, a commemoration and funeral are held for victims whose remains have been found and identified in the past year. After last year's burial of 14 victims, the number of those buried at the cemetery is 6,751, and around 250 victims were buried outside the complex in local cemeteries at the decision of surviving family members (Memčić, 2024). The families of the victims decide whether they want to wait for the burial until they find the complete remains, or only the remains found. They also decide whether they want to bury them in private family cemeteries or within the cemetery in Potočari. The process of finding mass graves, identifying the remains, and notifying families is led by the Missing Persons Institute (MPI), co-founded by the Council of Ministers of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the International Commission on Missing Persons (ICMP).[6]

Srebrenica is what scholars call 'a textbook case of gendercide' (Simic, 2009). While men and boys were executed, women were forcibly expelled, resulting in Srebrenica and Eastern Bosnia being ethnically cleansed of Bosniaks. In the aftermath of the massacre, the majority of the displaced population was concentrated in Tuzla and the surrounding towns that were liberated by the Army of RBiH. Since the internal refugees were mostly women, as a consequence of 'gendercide'[7], in the months after July 1995, they began to gather on the streets of Tuzla and demand that the authorities investigate what happened to their male family members. Self-organizing to find out what happened to their loved ones, women began collecting testimonies among refugees about what

[6] https://icmp.int/wp-content/uploads/2005/08/agreement-on-assuming-the-role-of-co-founders-of-the-missing-persons-institute-of-bosnia-and-herzegovina-scan.pdf

[7] The term that refers to gendering logic of genocide consisting of intending different ethnic cleansing strategies for different genders, as it was the case in the Srebrenica genocide.

they witnessed during the evacuation of the Srebrenica enclave and began pressuring domestic and international actors to conduct an investigation (Leydesdorff & Richardson, 2011). This movement resulted in establishing several organizations, such as 'Mothers of Srebrenica and Podrinje,' 'Women of Srebrenica,' and the 'Movement of Mothers of the Enclaves Srebrenica and Žepa' (Hronesova, 2017). The latter particularly stood out for the extent of its influence and lobbying, and actively lobbied for investigations into international responsibility regarding the fall of Srebrenica, hereinafter referred to as the Mothers' Association. It was established in 1996 with offices in Sarajevo and, later, Srebrenica, as a women-led, non-governmental, and non-profit organization that gathers survivors and family members of the victims who disappeared or were killed. Over 20 years of work, they have become recognizable internationally by demanding judicial justice, participating as witnesses on the ICTY, demonstrating and advocating for peace, accountability, and remembrance in non-violent ways (Hasić, Karabegović, & Turković, 2021). The Mothers became the subject of research in feminist academia in the areas of motherhood, identity, and women's agency, and today they continue to work in many fields. Their initial goal was to find out what happened to their male family members and to find their loved ones. Over the years, the goals of the Association have expanded to establishing facts and accountability for crimes, and then establishing and preserving memory (Gavrankapetanović-Redžić, 2023). Their role in the aftermath of genocide and the process of proving it is a historical role, and today they occupy a special kind of social power in Bosniak society.

However, the current reality for survivors is far from fair. Although the architects of the genocide were convicted in The Hague, the "Republic of the Serbian People of Bosnia and Herzegovina", and its successor, the "Serbian Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina", are the foundations of today's Republika Srpska, one of two entities within post-Dayton Bosnia. Although the creators of

Dayton claim that the establishment of Republika Srpska was a way of balancing power between the three constitutive peoples in Bosnia (Croats, Serbs and Bosniaks), the historical fact is that Republika Srpska (RS) is a continuation of the policies of its two predecessors, whose goal was never to exist within the internationally recognized and independent state of Bosnia and Herzegovina, but rather a republic whose ultimate goal was to become a part of Greater Serbia (Džananović, Medić, & Karčić, 2025). From the end of the war until today, the leaders of RS have consistently propagated a secessionist narrative, rendering meaningless the arguments of the creators of the Dayton Agreement. Bosnian Serb nationalist politicians continue to deny war crimes and genocide committed by Serb forces, call for secession encouraged by Aleksandar Vučić's regime in Serbia, and encourage policies that treat Bosniak returnees as second-class citizens. In history textbooks for elementary school, children in RS learn about Radovan Karadžić and Ratko Mladić, convicted war criminals, as the founders of Republika Srpska and national heroes (Maksimović, 2024). Every year, the Memorial Center systematically monitors and documents individuals and organizations that continuously try to deny and relativize the genocide, and publishes the denials report.[8] In the 2024 edition, the publication emphasized that narratives of denial and relativization have long crossed national borders, being virally spread and unsanctioned on social media. It also emphasized that the previous year, before the adoption of an international resolution on the genocide in Srebrenica in the UN, the Serbian academic community maximally relativized the facts through its works (Srebrenica, 2024). Although genocide denial in Bosnia and Herzegovina is punishable by law, the implementation and prosecution of deniers is almost non-existent.

[8] https://srebrenicamemorial.org/bs/istrazivanja/izvjestaj-o-negiranju-genocida-2024/31

From the beginning, the Mothers have been actively involved in decisions regarding the burial and identification of victims, monitoring the process themselves. Although they are still an important actor in terms of advocacy, establishing a culture of remembrance, and fighting against genocide denial, the image of them in society is that of crying mothers. Since genocide has not yet entered the curriculum of formal education, and considering the political climate in the country, it will not for a long time, awareness of the role of Mothers survives among survivors and in oral memories. The memory of their experiences and roles is not institutionalized like the memory of the victims in the Memorial Center. Although Mothers are considered representatives of women survivors, their activism mainly revolves around primary victims (men). Who and how will "remember" the role of Mothers, and is that the job of the Center or possible successors of the Mothers' Association? This also raises a question as to whether the Mothers want the Association to cease operations after their death and how they imagine the long-term future of women's narrative. These are the questions that this thesis seeks to answer.

Research Problem and Questions

My thesis aims to shift the focus of the discussion of women's memory towards the future. The research problem revolves around the future of women's narratives and memory-making, focusing on the Mothers' Association as a main representative of it.

My aim is to present how the future of the memory of women's experiences and roles in the Srebrenica genocide is imagined. This question is primarily being posed to the Memorial Center Srebrenica-Potočari and the Mothers' Association as two main actors in advocacy and memory-making. In the former, the question about the strategy for incorporating the women's perspectives into the mission of the Memorial Center arises, primarily, perspectives that center women in the narrative as agential actors, too, not only as victims. In the latter, the question about its future

arises, in terms of who would inherit the Association and how work would be continued. Therefore, my initial research question is:

What is the future of the memory of women's experiences and roles during the Srebrenica genocide?

Since this is a concern for both organizations, my follow-up questions aim to investigate the visions of both. They tend to challenge existing narratives that de-center women's agency and find out how the future of that narrative is imagined:

To what extent is the Memorial Center willing to incorporate gender aspects in the institutionalization of the memory of genocide in Srebrenica?

Are there strategies and mechanisms for carrying on the mission of Mothers of Srebrenica in the future, and what are they?

Since there is a possibility that women's memory and a memory of their activism are not a priority for Mothers of Srebrenica, and that the only important aspect for them is one of their murdered family members, the following questions must also be asked:

What is the Mothers' stance when it comes to female representation? Is a gender perspective important to them, and in what way?

Are they willing to transform the essence of the organization or leave it to the Memorial Center?

Objectives and Significance of the Study

The current engagement of the Memorial Center does not address women's memory as a separate structure, except in some temporary and travelling exhibitions and projects. Even in these kinds of events, the accent is on grieving motherhood and the difficulty of coping with life after the loss of family members. Women's experiences apart from those that fit into the narrative of victimhood are absent. There are no museum installations or exhibitions that present women's role in the

aftermath of genocide and establishing the Memorial Center, and the existing narrative doesn't address Mothers' agency. Permanent projects revolving around memory and oral history do not incorporate gender perspectives, nor use feminist methodologies when gathering data. Therefore, the only structure focusing specifically on women's memory is one of the Mothers' engagement. Although their organization itself diminishes diverse women's experiences with genocide and suffers from essentialist perspectives, right now, it is the only stable and permanent representation of women's memory.

The significance of this study is that it is oriented towards the future, instead of the past. Many women survivors, including members of women's associations, have passed away in recent years. It is only a matter of time before Mothers of Srebrenica ceases to exist as an organization and a social power. Therefore, it is crucial to develop a clear vision of how women's memory is going to outlive the shift of generations and to institutionalize the memory of women's agency and role in the aftermath of genocide. The importance of this research also lies in the idea of discovering and presenting a strategy for the future of women's memory, or, if such a thing does not exist, in pointing out the importance and urgency of such an undertaking. The outcomes of this research could be beneficial for the future projects of the Memorial Center and the collective memory of the Srebrenica genocide in general.

Regarding social significance, the acknowledgement of the role of Mothers and their agency shows how citizens can resist political violence and actively work for peace. It also contributes to society's understanding of conflict, genocide, and memory. Second, in a patriarchal society like Bosnia, Mothers can serve as an example that challenges essentialist ideas about women's passivity and encourages women to participate in their community in political issues. In a more just future, the role of Mothers should enter school history textbooks and be more acknowledged than it is in the

male-centered narrative today. Another significance of my research is the encouragement of the management of the Memorial Center, as well as the Association's most active members, to start thinking about this issue and developing possible strategies.

Methodology, Ethnographic Research

The exploration of the future of women's memory of genocide demands an understanding of the complexity of vulnerability, female agency, and the everyday reality of Bosniaks living in Srebrenica. Therefore, I based my research and writing genre on an ethnographic approach. Carole McGranahan argues that ethnography is beyond just a method. In her words, ethnography is "both something to know and a way of knowing, being used as a method, theory, and style of writing" (McGranahan, 2018, 1). McGranahan points out that we, as researchers, rather participate than observe daily life in a community (ibid., p. 4). I consider my stay in Potočari in September 2024 not just as an observation and collection of interviews, but also as a participation in the everyday life of returnees in a community. In addition to that, McGranahan defines ethnographic sensibility as "a sense of … the lived expectations, complexities, contradictions, possibilities, and grounds of any given cultural group" (ibid., p. 1). I believe my positionality as a Bosniak researcher improved understanding of the context and interpreting the contradictions and complexities in research outcomes. However, I expand on that further below when elaborating my positionality. Since this research aimed to explore visions for the future of the women's memory in both organizations, to create a full picture, I collected the data by conducting interviews with members of the Mothers' Association, the management of the Memorial Center, and employees whose job responsibilities are directly involved in projects regarding memory. Although both organizations mutually cooperate, their visions can differ. Therefore, the sets of questions for the two groups contained a couple of the same ones, regarding the ideas and visions for the future, while the more specific

ones regarding memory-making in the Center and the activities of the Mothers were specific to each group. I approached the research with the possibility that the Mothers, as well as the employees of the Memorial Center, might not consider themselves feminists. My sample included six women who are members of the Mothers' Association. Two of them are of the younger generations and are working in the Memorial Center, which means they belong to both participant groups. Among the four older members, there is Munira Subašić, the president and one of the founders of the movement, and Kada Hotić, the vice-president. When it comes to employees, the sample included the director of the Center himself, Emir Suljagić, the deputy director, Amra Begić, and seven other employees, including the two who are also members of the Association. This results in 13 participants in total.

Prior to conducting interviews, I informed the participants about the objectives of this study and the possible benefits of the research. Participants agreed to sign consent forms and to be recorded during interviews, during our meeting in Srebrenica in May of 2024, four months before research took place. Upon my visit in May 2024, Suljagić introduced me to many of the employees who were later interviewed. That same day, I met Munira Subašić, the president of the Association, who gave me the contacts of other Mothers, later participants in the research.

Interviews were conducted in September 2024, in Srebrenica and Potočari. Transcribing, translating, and analyzing were done in the winter of 2024/25. The advantages of interviewing in person in Srebrenica were numerous. Interviewing participants in their everyday environment provided them with a sense of safety and autonomy in this process, while speaking in Bosnian instead of English also reduced the level of formality and anxiety (considering that both interviewees' and the interviewer's native language is Bosnian), building trust with the interviewer

and being able to express more precisely and accurately. All these factors enriched the depth of the answers collected.

During my stay in Srebrenica, I resided in the house that is the headquarters of the Mothers' Association, from where I had only a 10-minute walk to the Memorial Center complex. After meeting in May 2024, Munira kindly offered me to stay at their house. Before the research period, I was accepted as a participant for the first International Summer School of Genocide Studies, which hosted around 20 students from around the world between 5-11 July 2024. The program was organized by the Memorial Center, and I had a chance to observe and make notes in advance, and introduce myself to other employees whom I planned to interview in September. Therefore, some of the notes and observations in the thesis also come from that experience. During my stay, in September 2024, both Munira and Šehida stayed in the house for several days, which further enriched my research period with informal conversations with them and observations of their daily lives. I participated in the social life of the Mothers and employees, and often had lunch and spent leisure time with them. I assume that this trust and hospitality on their part came precisely because of my positionality. As a young female Bosnian (and Bosniak)[9] researcher, I was received as *naša* (ours) with comments from the Mothers and employees, how glad they are that "finally our children are dealing with these topics, and not foreigners for a change". I claim that this influenced their willingness to share with me as many observations as possible, without viewing me as a foreign body. In that regard, my identity was not a limitation, but rather a factor that allowed participants to speak with ease, answering in a comfortable environment, which would not necessarily be the case in a different setting. As Sandra Harding argues, the "view from below"

[9] Bosnian is an umbrella "citizenship" term for ethnic groups living in Bosnia: Bosniaks, Croats, Serbs, and others. Bosniaks are predominantly Muslims. Therefore, my citizenship is Bosnian and my nationality/ethnicity Bosniak, although 'nationality' is sometimes differently interpreted in the Balkans than in the Western European context.

can reveal insights that would remain hidden in a more hierarchical power relation between researcher and participant (Harding, 1991).

This also calls for a more detailed presentation of my positionality as a researcher. I find it a bit complex, considering that I am a Bosnian in terms of citizenship and a Bosniak in terms of national affiliation, but that I was born after the war and in the Federation. In this way, compared to the returnees in Podrinje (RS), I am privileged. I was born in 2000, in one of the most populated and developed parts of the country, the Tuzla Canton, which in 1995 served as a refuge for survivors and refugees from the Srebrenica enclave. Putting things this way, I am not someone who was affected by the Srebrenica genocide in any personal way. However, I belong to a people who were systematically exterminated, exiled, and who were unwanted in their own country 30 years ago, and who are still second-class citizens in the RS. The pain of the people of Srebrenica is also my own. Therefore, I acknowledge that I can never be impartial on this subject and that my interpretations, no matter how much I try to be objective and distant, are sometimes subjective. However, I do not consider this an obstacle, but on the contrary, I am guided by the feminist standpoint theory and repeating Donna Haraway's argument that all knowledge is situated in its context (Haraway, 1988). Haraway claims that all knowledge is situated and influenced by the standpoint of a "producer", challenging traditional views towards researchers' objectivity and acknowledging how our social and cultural positions influence our ways of thinking and producing knowledge (ibid.). Therefore, I invite the reader to view my thesis through the same lens. Through the thesis body, I will sometimes incorporate my own observations, thoughts, and perceptions, as a new generation of Bosniak(n) women and as a feminist living in post-war Bosnia. I perceive these parts as fragments of an autobiography, therefore, I invite the reader to do the same.

'Tamo neke feministkinje': Perceptions of Feminism and Gender among Participants

Before engaging with analysis, I want to briefly explain why some participants distanced themselves from the terms *gender* and *feminism* with fear and caution. The first such case during the interviews was with Zenaida Hodžić, an employee of the archive and museum sector, who stated the following when asked whether the memory of the Mothers' activism could send a strong message to new generations of women about their inclusion in social processes:

> I'm going to say one sentence, but I don't want to sound like *some feminist over there* or something, but I think the world would function better if we were the only ones in power, so that we would have a better management of the state itself, let alone some institution or ordinary municipality. I think there should be more women involved in everything, and that all women should support each other no matter where they show up and where they go and what they do, that they should support each other in that, and not, you know, step on each other's toes. (emphasis added)

Some feminist overthere[10] was sitting across from her and recording the answer. Everything Zenaida said after that phrase indeed sounded *very* feminist, if not radical feminist, because of her opinion that women should be *the only ones in power.* For her, however, there was a necessity to distance herself from such a term. The additional word *over there* implied that's not us *over here.* We, here, in Potočari, in Srebrenica, or Bosnia, are nothing like that. Women who don't identify with feminism are nothing new and unusual. Still, why women who obviously think in feminist ways do not want to label themselves like that is another complexity that needs to be addressed. When it comes specifically to Bosniak Muslim women, as one I am myself, the Western-oriented imposed notion of feminism always repelled me from feminist circles. The mainstream notion of feminism in public discourse is being equated with what I call “donor-driven feminism.” What I mean by donor-driven feminism is a feminist (primarily activist and NGO) sector funded by Western powers, who have a soft-power approach to Bosnian society through organizations and

[10] Translated from Bosnian: “tamo neka feministkinja”.

collectives that have to follow the agenda of their donors (mostly the EU, as a part of the "integration" process). Such agendas are, of course, copy-pasted Western feminist agendas that neglect the domestic context and different struggles and stages of women's integration in Bosnian society (Helms, 2013). Kristen Ghodsee argues that the imposition of Western hegemonic understanding of feminism in post-socialist societies is mostly unsuccessful and rejected due to neglect of context and different struggles of women (Ghodsee, 2004). Another reason is the advocacy of feminist NGOs for LGBTQ rights in predominantly Muslim society, which makes religious people repel from identifying with feminism. Unfortunately, this is a very visible binary division in society, with a lack of an intersectional and contextual approach. In addition to that, mainstream feminism in Bosnia *is* Western-oriented, liberal feminism that I myself often criticize and find harmful. Therefore, it is impossible to claim that the "problem" is only on one side of society: as a religious person, in Sarajevo's feminist circles, I often felt like a black sheep, listening to very problematic and Islamophobic attitudes nurtured in such circles, as a result of Western influence and post-socialist secular heritage that often normalized and reinforced Islamophobia. Therefore, it's no wonder that many women feel like feminism is only for a certain type of woman, and that type is not a Muslim one. Zilka Spahić-Šiljak argues that the production of feminist knowledge in the Balkans is divided between secular and religious feminist circles. She compares the neocolonial treatment and marginalization of feminists from the center towards feminists in the Balkans, with Balkan secular feminists that ignore religious feminism similarly (Spahić-Šiljak, 2018). Of course, not all people fall into those binary traps, even among my research participants. Zenaida's colleague, Merima Mujičić, did not have problems speaking in a "feminist" vocabulary and elaborating on patriarchy, male-dominated society, and the need for feminist approaches in memory projects. One of my questions for all the employees was whether their memory and oral

history projects use feminist methods or if they plan to include them in the future. Almost all of the replies were: "No, what are these?", expressed in a timid tone. After I elaborated a little bit on what it would mean, most of them would excitedly say: "But we have that!" All of this created the impression that the words *feminism* and *gender* (used in English)[11] symbolize Western exploitation of painful domestic issues such as genocide, and that this is why people carefully avoid putting the genocide, the Mothers, and feminism in the same basket.

When it comes to the Mothers specifically, they would tend to say in public that they are not feminists, although on their webpage there is a sentence that says: "The Association has placed the protection of women and children within the family and society, and within the framework of human rights, high on the list of its goals, which implies support for the policy of full equality of women in society and politics." (2019) In addition to that, the scope of their work and their historical transformation from passive victim into one with agency and autonomy is feminist, from many perspectives. Still, the Mothers sometimes perpetuate essentialist notions of womanhood and motherhood themselves, which I analyze broadly in Chapter 2.

This was a brief address of my participants' resentment towards the terms feminism and gender. The reason for addressing this separately was to avoid the impression that could be made by a reader that participants, especially women, have anti-feminist stances. As I mentioned in the example of using English word *gender* instead Bosnian *rod,* this stems more from caution against defining according to Western concepts and possible epistemic violence.

Structure of the Thesis

This thesis begins with the presentation of the existing scholarship on the topic of the Mothers of Srebrenica and memorialization in the context of genocide, as well as the theory and concepts on

[11] Bosnian language has its own word for gender: *rod*, but participants used explicitly *gender* in disapproving tone.

which I build my analysis and discussion. The following three chapters are analytical ones. The second chapter, *Gender and a Post-Genocide Nation: Where is the Link between Mothers and Feminism?,* sets the ground for discussion and analyzes the existing role of Mothers in society. It critically reflects on the essentialist image of Mothers constructed in Bosniak society and explores perceptions of gender and women's agency in the context of war and genocide. The third chapter, *Gendered Genocide – Gendered Memory,* discusses the dominance of women's and maternal memory as a consequence of gendered genocide in which survivors are mostly women. It analyzes research findings concerning the contemporary setting of memory-making processes in the Memorial Center, as well as the Mothers' role in memory activism. It also critically reflects on the issue of *who* decides what goes into the narrative today, introducing the reader to the third analytical chapter and the discussion of the future. Thus, in *The Future of Women's Memory and Its Uncomfortable Question: What happens after the Generation of Mothers is gone?,* I interpret and analyze the rest of my research material that addresses the future of the Mothers' Association and the memory of women survivors' experiences and roles in general. I address the problem of unsustainable activism and the uncertain future of women's memory as micro-reflections of the state's uncertainty, the political system, and peace itself. In conclusion, I summarize my key findings and suggestions for further research, together with a call for efforts to preserve the memory of women survivors' experiences and roles as part of the collective memory of genocide.

CHAPTER 1 – THEORY AND SCHOLARSHIP

This chapter presents existing works on the memorialization of the Srebrenica genocide and the role of the Association *Movement of Mothers of Srebrenica and Žepa Enclaves.* There has been a lack of attention paid to memorialization within Mothers' activism in the existing scholarship, which I intend to investigate further. Regarding the theoretical framework, I situate my research within the existing theoretical works on motherhood activism, memorialization processes, and feminist theories on gender and nation.

Review of Existing Research

There is considerable research that addresses memory in the context of the Srebrenica genocide. Filtering the literature through the lenses of my subject of study, two types of works stand out. The first explores the work of the Memorial Center in Srebrenica and the practices of memorialization, and the second addresses the Mothers and their activism. Since my topic serves as a bridge between those two, asking about the memory of women and the role of the Mothers and their Association in that aspect, in outlining this literature, I will also address works that touch on Mothers and memory, expanding upon the existing gap in that area.

Literature on memory predominantly focuses on the role of the Memorial Center as a primary actor in preserving the memory of the victims and survivors of the Srebrenica genocide, as well as its historical facts. However, some works also explore the intersection of gender and memory in the Center's exhibitions, providing a valuable foundation for expanding the discussion on the role of the Mothers and the future of women's memory. For instance, Janet Jacobs investigates how gender is represented in the narratives of the Srebrenica genocide in the Center. Drawing on the gendered

nature of the genocide itself, in which few women were sentenced to death, Jacobs argues that the narrative within the factory space in the museum complex of the Center revolves around frightened and helpless women and children who have been separated from their male members of families (Jacobs, 2017). These installments do not center women's experiences but rather reinforce the victimhood narrative. I expand Jacob's argumentation by arguing that the existing narratives in the Memorial Center decentralize and marginalize the agency of the Mothers.

According to Olivera Simić, these commemorative motifs of women victims are established through maternal vulnerability and sorrow in post-war widowhood and loss, presenting women survivors only in relation to their husbands and sons (Simic, 2013). Simić's work is a valuable basis for discussion about the victim-centered narrative at the Memorial Center that marginalizes the stories of women who do not fit the image of a helpless, sorrowful mother. Simić additionally explores the establishment of narratives at the Memorial Center in the context of dark tourism, arguing that it has already become one of the popular places of such character in the world (Simic, 2009). This is not the only critical review of the concept of the Memorial Center. For instance, Ljiljana Radonić discusses how the Srebrenica Memorial Center uses the Holocaust template to prove' Europe-fitness' during EU accession aspirations (Radonić, 2018). Radonić's and Simić's works present one of the lenses through which the Memorial Center has been viewed in scholarship. However, I disagree that the conceptualization of the Memorial Center, although based on the Holocaust template, was established in the same way to fit into Radonić's "Europe-fitness". The reason may simply be an attempt to build legitimacy on the European and international scene through a conceptualization that is accepted as 'modern' and legitimate in Europe. In this way, the Memorial Center wants to establish an arena for its advocacy and work, and not to collect points for joining the European Union. In addition to that, although the society

in general is in favor of joining the European Union, it is mainly due to the narrative that it would help Bosnia develop economically and politically. Bosnians consider themselves Europeans already and do not need EU accession as a "confirmation" of their Europeanness. I have never heard a person living in the Balkans questioning that, and my first encounter with opposite and oriental perceptions towards Balkan states was in Western Europe.

Johanna Mannergren Selimovic investigates the encounter between external and local actors in the politics of remembrance in the case of the Srebrenica Memorial Center and the Kigali Genocide Memorial Center in Rwanda. Mannergren Selimovic argues that the Srebrenica Memorial Center serves as a platform for external peacebuilding interventions (Selimovic, 2013), which is important for understanding how and with what priorities narratives are established in the Center. Given that peacebuilding is one of the important factors in deciding on narratives, centering Mothers, their role, and agency would further promote peacebuilding messages in the Center, as an example of resilience against militarism and nationalism.

Together with peacebuilding, it is necessary to highlight the role that the Memorial Center plays in Bosniak society in terms of establishing collective memory. Sarina Bakić argues that the existence and further development of the Srebrenica Memorial Center are crucial for building a culture of remembrance in Bosnia and Herzegovina (Bakić, 2021). I have briefly presented the problem of the case of the curriculum in the RS. Throughout my thesis, I will echo Bakić's argument about the importance of the work of the Memorial Center, in the aspect of the fight against denial and continued nationalist-separatist politics. Furthermore, I want to expand this understanding by emphasizing the importance of this institution in a society that excludes the history of genocide from formal education, or imposes a counter history, as in the case of the history school textbooks in RS.

My goal is to include the role of Mothers in this discussion, drawing on literature that highlights their role in society in a similar way, but to criticize the existing narratives in the Memorial Center that decenter the agency of the Mothers. When it comes to commemorative practices as a way of memory making in the context of the Srebrenica genocide, Sarah Wagner (2010) and Craig Evan Pollack (2003) include the role of the Mothers in the process of establishing the Memorial Center as we know it today, so we can perceive their works as a transitional literature from the Memorial Center to the Mothers' Association. Wagner investigates the space and its politics of memory in the case of Potočari cemetery, discussing the process of materializing absence through tabulating loss. In this discussion, Wagner brings up the role of Mothers in establishing the Memorial Center and cemetery in Potočari, Srebrenica, and its meaning for a survivor community. She argues that Mothers insisted on this location to transform the landscape as a physical and geographical healing of wounds, alongside forcing the international community to acknowledge complicity and physically document the scale of killings against denials (Wagner S. , 2010). Pollack underlined the importance of location for the survivor community as well, claiming that the restoration of physical and social environment through burial mitigates the scope of trauma, providing a window into mourning and recovery of survivors (Pollack, 2003). In his later article, Pollack argues that burial processes go beyond individual mourning for survivors included in advocacy and memory activism, claiming that for them, it also embodies the recognition of genocide and its impact on the current political context, and shaping the future (Pollack, 2010). However, although Wagner and Pollack address the role of the Mothers in a non-passive way, they examine it in the past, while I shift the focus to the future of memory and its sustainability.

When it comes to literature that focuses more specifically on the Mothers, and not only in relation to the Memorial Center, the existing works revolve around activism, motherhood as a political

identity, and the narratives of victimhood. Selma Leydesdorff's book *Surviving the Bosnian Genocide: The Women of Srebrenica Speak* is a work on women survivors of the Srebrenica genocide and Leydesdorff's attempt to give them a 'voice'. By interpreting interviews with 60 women, she centers women's lives and experiences during and after the war, showing their agency in fighting for the truth about their loved ones and for the responsibility of perpetrators (Leydesdorff & Richardson, 2011). Leydersdorff's works will primarily be used to establish historical context regarding the role of Mothers in the aftermath of genocide.

The discussion of agency is one of the most common in feminist works concerning the women of Srebrenica. Scholarship on motherhood identity against political violence addresses worldwide cases of collectives of mothers who organized themselves to fight against oppression and political violence, such as mothers in Northern Ireland, Palestine/Israel, and Argentina. After the 1990s, the women survivors, best known as the Mothers of Srebrenica today, have also become popular research subjects in this area. I briefly mentioned in the introduction that there are four women's organizations whose work is related to Srebrenica and the surrounding Podrinje region.[12] However, the term Mothers of Srebrenica is mostly associated with the Movement of Mothers of the Enclaves of Srebrenica and Žepa, the Association with the greatest reach in advocacy and activism, and the focus of my thesis. Many valuable works discuss their role in the aftermath of genocide. For instance, Jasmina Gavrankapetanović-Redžić explores the case of the Association of Mothers in the context of motherhood as political identity. Gavrankapetanović-Redžić presents the role of the Mothers' Association in establishing the facts and responsibilities for the genocide committed in the Srebrenica enclave, arguing that the Mothers act as a collective morality through their social power in a society (Gavrankapetanović-Redžić, 2023). She points out that over the years of their

[12] Geographical term for eastern Bosnia, which is along the Drina River, part of the country that is now mostly in the territory of the RS and was largely ethnically cleansed of Bosniaks during the war.

work, the Association has expanded its goals to include establishing and preserving memory, in addition to the primary goal of finding out what happened to their loved ones and advocating for accountability and justice. Gavrankapetanović-Redžić argues for the importance of the institutionalization of memory, but unlike the previous works concerning memorialization, she brings up the role of the Mothers' Association, not solely the Memorial Center. However, she does not delve deeper into how Mothers establish and maintain memory, but rather focuses on their role as a moral dimension in Bosniak society. Janet Jacobs and Aida Rogonich Cruickshank (2021) explore the maternal memory in child survivors of genocide, arguing it contributes to the endgendering of memorialization (Jacobs & Cruickshank, 2021). Their findings illuminate the agency of the Mothers and present another way in which they contribute to establishing a culture of remembrance, and which does not fall under advocacy and activism modes of action. However, when it comes to the overview of the Association's types of engagement, including the one with the culture of remembrance, an article by Jasmin Hasić, Dženeta Karabegović, and Bisera Turković investigates the Association's advocacy in both local and international contexts. According to them, there are three types of engagement in the Association: engaging with judicial institutions in order to help establish facts and accountability, creating a locally embedded and globally recognized culture of remembrance, and pursuing international recognition of the genocide while protesting against denials (Hasić, Karabegović, & Turković, 2021). Hasić, Karabegović, and Turković argue that the Mothers have managed to project a 'particular niche foreign policy image of Bosnia and Herzegovina'(ibid., 32), emphasizing that, in parallel with the state, they have become actors in the field of diplomacy, working cohesively, while the state, due to its political instability and tensions, has done less in terms of culture of remembrance and international recognition of genocide.

The intersection of agency and the notion of victimhood, and how those two paradoxically coexist in the case of the Mothers of Srebrenica, is also explored. Olivera Simić argues that the Mothers, although using the rhetoric of victimhood and motherhood whenever they speak out, actually challenge the notion of passive victims by their activism and advocacy efforts (Simic, 2009). Simić calls their roles of both agents and victims 'conflictive'. Elissa Helms portrays a more nuanced notion of the victim that incorporates both agency and victimhood intertwined, challenging the understanding of victimhood based on passivity and helplessness (Helms, 2013). In her book *Innocence and Victimhood: Gender, Nation, and Women's Activism in Postwar Bosnia-Herzegovina,* Helms discusses women's postwar activism and gendered nationalism within the narratives of victimhood and innocence. Her research portrays how initiatives of Bosnian women perpetuate and complicate the dominant essentialist views of women as victims and peacemakers, critically approaching the intersection of agency and victimhood, which Simić characterizes as a conflictive one (Helms, 2013). Helms' arguments will be beneficial for many discussions in my research because she challenges the essentialist images of Mothers in society and the understanding of agency and victimhood among research participants. When it comes to the issue of 'political' in Mothers' activism, Helms addresses the issue of the political nature of women's activism in Bosnia. In her book, but also other articles, Helms points out that politics in Bosnia is perceived as a male, corrupt sphere and that women activists, whose field of activity is often very much political, define themselves or are defined by the others as apolitical in contrast to that perception (Helms, 2003). This relates to my latter part of my research where I analyze the participants' perceptions and stances towards victimhood. Helms' works help to understand the complex and sometimes contradictory understanding of victimhood. In addition to that, Helms'

argument about the 'apolitical' nature of women's organizations will be beneficial to my discussion of the future of the Association and women's activism.

This has been an overview of literature dealing with the Srebrenica-Potočari Memorial Center, the Mothers' Association, and the collective memory of the Srebrenica genocide. Those presented are the ones that contribute mostly to my research question with their arguments and outcomes of research, situate it within existing scholarship, but also show how my thesis builds a bridge between two separate focuses on the Center and the Mothers when it comes to memory. The presented scholarship, divided into two groups, needs to expand by addressing the Mothers' role in memorialization more deeply and in relation to the Center as a main actor in memory making. This raises the question of the future and sustainability of the memory of women's experiences and roles in the Srebrenica genocide. Although the Center is the primary actor in establishing the memory, the Mothers' Association represents the voice of female survivors. There is a need to explore who is considered the future maintainer of this memory, as the generations of Mothers are slowly on the way out.

Orienting Towards the Future

As previously discussed, both groups of literature deal primarily with the past. Some of the scholarship is interested in the future only when it deals with the Memorial Center, although even there, it does not specifically ask what the future of the work is, but discusses the contemporary setting. At the same time, works that explore the role of the Mothers focus on their past achievements or deal with their current engagements and advocacies.

In that sense, my research shifts the focus to the future, asking what memory will look like after the Mothers are gone. The question of the survival of memory and the establishment of a culture of remembrance after the departure of generations of survivors is always sensitive but necessary,

especially in the context of genocide and ethnic cleansing. Significant works have been done in this area in the context of Holocaust survivors and collective memory, which could be applied to the context of the Srebrenica genocide. Marianne Hirsch coined the term postmemory, which refers to the generation after survivors, whose memory of events is based on personal narratives, images, and behaviors among whom they grew up (Hirsch, 2012). Therefore, postmemory can serve as identity formation, but also as a means of passing on a memory to next generations and building a culture of remembrance. Another significant work in this area is by Aleida Assmann, which differentiates between two types of collective memory: communicative and cultural (Assmann, 2011). Assman defines communicative memory as the one shared on an everyday scale in a social community, that is informal and usually limited to three generations. This type of memory is built on lived experiences and oral stories. In contrast, cultural memory is defined as an institutionalized one, sustained through rituals, symbols, texts, and monuments. In that sense, cultural memory serves as a collective identity formation while simultaneously preserving the memory on a long-term basis (Assmann, 2011, 36-41). It appears that cultural memory is more durable, and that the survival of the communicative one is uncertain unless it is transformed into a cultural one. Since I am dealing with the memory that needs to outlive its survivors, both Hirsch's and Assmann's arguments serve as a basis for my discussion about the future. Understanding what kind of memory is promoted by Mothers and the Memorial Center is crucial for exploring in what ways memory of women's experiences and roles can be preserved. In addition to that, Avishai Margalit argues that remembering atrocities goes beyond personal and historical interests, positioning it as a moral duty of the community (Margalit, 2002). Margalit's argument additionally emphasizes the need to explore the future of the memory of women's experiences and roles, in a context of mass genocide denials and separatist-nationalist narratives.

Given that the Srebrenica genocide was a gendered one in terms of killing men and forcefully displacing women, as a result, the culture of remembrance is largely shaped by women's and maternal ways of remembering. Therefore, the question of the future of women's memory comes naturally. My thesis aims to introduce that question in the existing scholarship on Mothers, the Memorial Center, and the collective memory of genocide.

Overview of Key Concepts and Definitions: Memory, Motherhood, Gender, and Nation

Memory

When it comes to memory, my work will mainly be situated in the discussion of collective memory, the role of gender in collective memory and culture of remembrance, and the institutionalization of memory. The term that I am going to use throughout my thesis is collective memory, as coined by French sociologist Maurice Halbwachs to mean memory that is not constructed individually but socially within societal frameworks such as family, religion, and nation (Halbwachs, 1992). Collective memory is not the sum of individual memories, but a social construction through which groups construct and sustain a shared past through frameworks of community (ibid.). In addition, Pierre Nora's concept of *lieux de mémoire*, or sites of memory, will be used to refer to the processes of institutionalizing memory and shaping physical spaces as efforts to maintain consciousness and remembrance when organic memory starts to decline (Nora, 1989). In that sense, I perceive Potočari cemetery and Memorial complex as one of the examples of *lieux de mémoire.* When it comes to memory constructed in war memorials and museums, I will rely on the term *cosmopolitan memory* coined by scholars Daniel Levy and Natan Sznaider (2002). Levy and Sznaider define cosmopolitan memory as a new form of collective memory emerging in a global context and transcending ethnic and national boundaries. In that sense, the memory

produced in the Memorial Center can be labeled as cosmopolitan memory. In addition to Nora, Levy, and Sznaider, I will rely on the works of Nayanika Mookherjee, who writes about the aesthetics of war memorials and museums (Mookherjee, 2011). Mookherjee builds on the concept of cosmopolitan memory, introducing the term genocidal cosmopolitanism, which refers to the efforts of war memorials and museums to de-territorialize their approach in the memory production (ibid.). Mookherje also discusses how the trope 'never again' verbalizes the universal search for judicial and moral responsibilities for crimes against humanity. Levy and Sznaider also discuss this trope, claiming it is an indicator of the cosmopolitan memory's main feature: a future-oriented dimension, since this kind of memory serves not only to preserve the past, but also to warn about the future and call for prevention (Levy & Sznaider, 2002).

Motherhood

As a key foundation of the Mothers' activism and representation, motherhood must also be considered in a critical light. Linda Ahall positions motherhood as a myth underpinning gendered representations of female agency in the context of political violence (Ahall, 2012, 108). By positioning motherhood as a myth, Ahall criticizes essentialist understandings of agency and gender in political violence, showing how motherhood operates in representations of female agency and how it perpetuates gendered representations of it. According to Hall, motherhood is a conflicting element here, since it serves not only as an essentialist narrative that denies women agency, but also as the one that helps us understand how that agency is enabled. This conflictual nature is reflected in the case of Mothers who position themselves based on their roles as mothers and wives and who use motherhood as a source of their agency. For the discussion on the essentialist notions of Mothers in Bosniak society and sanctification of that image, I will use the works of Marina Warner on the historical development of the myth of the Virgin Mary as a source

of female inferiority and dependence (Warner, 2013). Her exploration of the image of the Lady of Sorrow, a portrayal of a sorrowful mother without agency, will establish ground for my claim that Mothers of Srebrenica are framed as Bosniak *Mater Dolorosa.*

Gender and Nation

The understanding of gender and nation through a feminist lens is important for several reasons: how gender relations affect and are affected by national processes, what is the role of gender in conflict (in this case genocide), and what is the Mothers' positionality. I will mostly refer to Nira Yuval-Davis' book, *Gender and Nation,* in which she analyzes gender relations in a causal relationship with national projects and processes. Yuval-Davis argues that an integral part of the construction of nationhood is establishing and reinforcing notions of both `manhood' and `womanhood', and that women are perceived as biological producers of the national community (Yuval-Davis, 1997). Cynthia Cockburn argues that the perpetuation of armed conflicts and militarization also has a patriarchal understanding of gender relations at its core. Together with political and economic ones, she claims that gender relations act as one of the main factors in creating and perpetuating conflicts and militarization (Cockburn, 2010). Yuval-Davis' and Cockburn's works help understand the outcome of gendered genocide and the positionality of Mothers. Since the ethnic cleansing policy of Bosnian Serb soldiers consisted of killing men and forcefully displacing women, this shows how women were not perceived as the same kind of threat as men, and although perceived as 'biological producers', they were considered harmless without the actual leaders of the group, men (Helms, 2013). In this sense, womanhood and manhood were the basic divisions inside the targeted group in the nationalist genocidal mode of thinking. In addition to that, as a direct consequence of that 'gender division', primary survivors were women, who lived in a patriarchal setting before and after the genocide, and primarily occupied the roles

of wives and mothers, or as Yuval-Davis frames it, 'biological reproducers of the nation' (Yuval-Davis, 1997). This also explains to some extent the establishment of the role of the Mothers in the post-war community and why motherhood operates as the basis of their agency. In her book *Bananas, Beaches and Bases,* Cynthia Enloe argues that women are often cast as metaphors of the nation, being perceived as vulnerable and in need of protection (Enloe, 1989). I draw on both Yuval-Davis's and Enloe's conceptualizations of gender and the nation relationship when discussing the Mothers within society in the second chapter. In addition to that, Dubravka Žarkov argues that the primary image of women in Yugoslav ethnic wars is that of a victim (Žarkov, 2007). Žarkov argues that feminists have interpreted motherhood as inseparable from nationalism and perceived maternal agency as conflictive with feminist one when it collided with feminist politics (ibid. 72). In my analysis of motherhood in the case of Srebrenica, I present the Mothers as an example of a paradox, in which I nuance their perpetuation of the essential and national meanings of motherhood, but at the same time break the passive notion of woman and mother through their activism.

In addition to that, my understanding of Mothers' positionality and their roles in the domestic and global arena will be based on the concept of intersectionality, developed by Kimberle Crenshaw (Crenshaw, 1989). By applying Crenshaw's intersectionality to the positionality of Mothers as agential actors, it is presented how their victimhood serves both as a standpoint for their advocacy and as a source of essentialization of their image in Bosniak society. The intersection of gender, ethnicity, and ruralness presents the account on which Mothers were perceived in post-war years in domestic social spheres.

When it comes to situating the research in the current political and social context of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the role of women in it, I will rely on Elissa Helms' book on women's

activism in Bosnia and its complexities (Helms, 2013), when discussing the understanding of what is considered political. When discussing notions of feminism, identity, and the positionality of Bosnian women, I will mainly rely on domestic authors such as Zilka Spahić-Šiljak. She argues that religious women are being marginalized from feminist circles in the Balkans (Spahić-Šiljak, 2018), which I use to argue that anti-feminist stances among participants do not stem from patriarchy, but from fear of epistemic violence and Western-oriented narratives about the Mothers. This was a brief overview of previous literature that dealt with or somewhat touched on my topic, and theoretical works that will serve as a framework for my analysis and interpretation. I sought to present a gap in the literature that I am trying to fill with my research, answering the question: What after the Mothers?

CHAPTER 2 – GENDER AND POST-GENOCIDE NATION: WHERE IS THE LINK BETWEEN THE MOTHERS AND GENDER?

The purpose of this chapter is to introduce the reader to the historical role of the Mothers of Srebrenica and to situate their activism in the broader understandings of gender and feminism. To make this clear, this chapter will contextualize the conversation in the contemporary post-genocide reality of Bosniaks, both in Bosnia generally and in Srebrenica (RS) specifically. By incorporating the insights of participants on women's activism, gender, and the everyday reality of living in Srebrenica, and integrating them into existing scholarship, this chapter endeavors to present the perceptions of Mothers' activism in relation to feminism and gender dialogues in post-genocide society.

Historical Role of the Mothers of Srebrenica

In the aftermath of the war and the Bosnian genocide's culmination point, Srebrenica in July 1995, women survivors started searching for their male relatives and family members. As discussed earlier, Serb ethnic cleansing policies in Srebrenica consisted of geographically displacing women and children and detaining and killing men (Nuhanović, 2007). As a result, almost all survivors were women. In such circumstances, they organized in groups to search for their missing, predominantly male family members, then to demand an open investigation to establish facts and responsibilities for the genocide in the UN-protected areas of Srebrenica and Žepa. One of the groups organized was precisely the Association *Movement of Mothers of Srebrenica and Žepa Enclaves,* the one that I focus on in my analysis and refer to as the *Mothers' Association* hereafter.

The Mother's Association was founded in 1996 as a cumulative point of women's joint activism focused on searching for the missing. As the president of the Association, Munira Subašić, recalled during her interview with me, the earliest activities consisted of approaching local and foreign decision-makers, protesting, and blocking the streets in Tuzla. They also conducted interviews among survivors with the intent to gather as much as possible first-hand information from witnesses that could be forwarded to the ICTY. In her interview with Jasmina Gavrankapetanović-Redžić, Munira claimed those exact interviews enabled prosecutors of the ICTY to filter the identities of Serb soldiers being spotted taking away Bosniaks who were never found again (Gavrankapetanović-Redžić, 2023). In that sense, women survivors acted as first-hand witnesses to their family members' disappearance.

The Vice-President of the Association, Kada Hotić, and a board member, Šehida Abdurahmanović, also spoke about women's activism during the siege and after arriving at the safe territories. They recalled those first few months as a difficult and exhausting period in which women's activism knew no boundaries, driven by the goal of finding their loved ones. When the Association was registered in 1996, it counted 8116 women, according to Munira. Its initial goal was to find out what happened to their family members, but as events unfolded, and they realized their loved ones had been killed in a massacre, the fields of activity and goals of the Association evolved. First, they started participating in the process of finding and identifying the bodies and decisions regarding burial processes (Wagner S. E., 2008). Since this is a slow process that is still taking place, they gradually developed additional goals: establishing facts and accountability for crimes, then establishing and preserving memory (Gavrankapetanović-Redžić, 2023). What originally began as a search for loved ones by rural, family-oriented women has grown into an indispensable part of society's collective memory and peace-building processes.

Since the remains of over a thousand victims have still not been found, it can't be claimed that the Association has fulfilled its original goal, and thus fully directed its focus to memory activism. Therefore, their official website describes the mission of the Association as follows:

> The main reason for the establishment of the Association was the desire and need to participate in clarifying the fate of those disappeared in July 1995, and then those who disappeared from 1992 to 1995 in Srebrenica and Žepa, as well as Sokolac, Han Pijesak, Rogatica, Vlasenica, Bratunac, Zvornik, Višegrad and Foča [nearby towns not in the enclaves]. Over time, the Association has faced new challenges, from participating in exhumations, identifications, and burials of found remains, to the economic, social, health, and educational problems of the children of our members. These activities have led to cooperation with organizations dealing with the issue of missing and deceased persons from all over the former Yugoslavia and with NGO's and government organizations from all over the world. (Pokret "Majke enklava Srebrenica i Žepa", 2019)

As Gavrankapetanović-Redžić pointed out, the expansion of the Association's objectives is visible from this excerpt. It also indicates the existing prioritization of those objectives. Nevertheless, the appalling factual situation in which over a thousand victims have not yet been found does not prevent the Mothers from focusing on other goals, such as the establishment and maintenance of collective memory. On their webpage, there is a list of projects and initiatives they have been part of, or initiated themselves, such as traveling exhibitions, round tables, and conferences.[13] In addition, the webpage states they regularly monitor the exhumations of mass graves and the planning of burials and funerals for victims, visit and provide moral and psychological support to the families of the victims, and care for children without one or both parents (Pokret “Majke enklava Srebrenica i Žepa”, 2019). During my research, I had the opportunity to see for myself the many ways in which the Mothers care for the returnee community in Srebrenica and the surrounding area. They were also one of the initiators of the Resolution on Srebrenica adopted in the EU Parliament in 2015 (Al Jazeera Balkans, 2015), and the one adopted by the United Nations in 2024 (Al Jazeera Balkans, 2024). Together with a team of lawyers, they prepared a lawsuit

[13] https://www.enklave-srebrenica-zepa.org/onama.php

against the Netherlands at the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg in 2020, for recognition of responsibility and complicity in genocide and payment of material damages to the victims (N1 Bosna i Hercegovina, 2020).

Returning to their earlier activism, it is also inevitable to address their role in locating and establishing the Memorial Center itself. In 2001, by the decision of the then High Representative in BiH, Wolfgang Petritsch, dated 25 October 2000, a permanent land location was determined for the construction of a cemetery and memorial for the victims, initially in Potočari[14] in Srebrenica. After attempts to obstruct the construction by the RS authorities, an alternative proposed location was Kladanj, the geographically closest municipality in the Federation, i.e., outside the RS. This is the moment when the Mothers resolutely refused to bury their loved ones in Kladanj just so as not to raise political tensions, and began to lobby the authorities and officials against that decision, writing a petition and protesting (Pollack, 2003). When asked about the relationship between the Mothers' Association and the Memorial Center, Deputy Kada Hotić responded: "Our Association gave birth to the Memorial Center", mentioning the petition and the rebellion against the location outside Srebrenica and RS. As a result, the OHR and the authorities reverted to the original location decision, and in 2001, a second decision was made to establish the Srebrenica-Potočari Foundation, a Memorial and Cemetery. The establishment of the Memorial Center as an institution and museum complex as we know it today was only arranged years later (Office of the High Representative, 2007).

[14] Potočari is a village belonging to the municipality of Srebrenica, and on the entrance of the town of Srebrenica. One coming to Srebrenica has to pass by the Potočari cemetery in order to drive to the town.

Figure 1 The picture captures Srebrenica mother in front of the Anne Frank house in Amsterdam. It is hung on the wall of the Association's house in Potočari.

The positionality of the Mothers did not play as an extenuating circumstance for them. Most of them came from rural, patriarchal backgrounds in which they had played the roles of wives and mothers before the war. Having become widows and having lost their sons and husbands in the genocide, they became a vulnerable category in a society that viewed families without a "male head" as social cases. Gavrankapetanović-Redžić argues that these circumstances further worsened the perception of their activism among Muslims after the war, who inherited the Yugoslav social dichotomy of urban/rural and male (public)/female (private) spheres (Gavrankapetanović-Redžić, 2023, 135). In this sense, rurality was consolidated as a major determinant of their positionality even after the war. This was not to mention that most of the women were semi or completely illiterate, without knowledge of foreign languages and social spheres outside the family and marital ones. Of course, not all Mothers shared the same position. Some of them had lived and worked in the town of Srebrenica before the war (Helms, 2013). However, they were still perceived negatively just by advocating as women and widows. In the first years of their activism and advocacy, many local figures (Muslim ones as well), as well as citizens, adopted discriminatory treatment towards them as internally displaced persons. In such an atmosphere, the Mothers were often perceived as illiterate and backward peasants who did not know how to behave properly (Nettelfield & Wagner,

2014, 82-83). As someone who grew up in a village, Poljice, that received many refugees, I, myself, often heard people around me talk about them as second-class citizens. My grandma often talked about how the customs, routines, and expressions of the refugees were originally mocked and ridiculed, although even she, herself, used the word *izbjeglice* [15](refugees), as a kind of derogatory term, simultaneously pitying and distancing them from "our people".

Surviving in such a climate and advocating for investigation into the missing, as (widowed) women, has not been easy at all. By situating the activism of the Mothers in this post-war context, it is no overstatement to say that their transformation and claim of agency for collective justice and responsibility was one kind of social phenomenon. As discussed in the previous chapter, it was explored by feminist scholars in terms of motherhood identity and agency. Unfortunately, it was also exploited for essentialist narratives that (accidentally or intentionally) additionally reinforced patriarchal notions of womanhood, as the next section explores.

Žena/Majka: Essentialist Notions of Motherhood and Womanhood

"A mother is a mother, and it cannot be anything else", said Munira during the interview. The way I understood this statement is that a mother can't express any other agency than a maternal one. Her source of power only stems from motherhood. Apart from essentializing motherhood, the equating of it with the essence of a woman and her existence was an untouchable basis of conversations in the interviews during my research period, which should not be questioned. The sanctification of motherhood was almost an inevitable consequence in the context of the Mothers of Srebrenica, and even somewhat understandable, although it caused a counter-effect in the image that society holds of the Mothers.

[15] Mostly used for internal refugees, rarely for diaspora or migrants from other countries coming to Bosnia and EU (for those "migranti" is the mainstream term);

It is natural to begin with the title: not the Movement of *women* of Srebrenica and Žepa enclaves, but the Movement of *Mothers.* This choice was always interesting for me, but not in terms of equalizing their identity with motherhood. I was raised in a patriarchal setting, and my questioning of it only came in recent years. But I was always curious about the choice they made between the positionality of mothers and wives. First, there is already a lesser-known Association called Women of Srebrenica, which I mentioned in the introduction. Second, the term *women* would serve as an umbrella term for both roles, while the term *mothers* obviously excludes, or at least marginalizes to some degree, sacrifices based on the loss of a husband. In that sense, constructing collective identity mainly on the loss of children, and only secondarily on the loss of spouses and the rest of their male relatives, further consolidates motherhood as the basis of that identity. Linda Ahall argues that the perceptions of women's agency in the context of political violence are usually built upon the image of motherhood (Ahall, 2012). Lucy B. Hall expands on Ahall's argument by highlighting contradictions and complexities occurring in motherhood, or more precisely, maternal agency. Hall argues that maternal agency is a source of both conflicting opportunities and constraints in the domain of gender, violence, and security. In that sense, logics of maternity can both constrain and enable women's agency, which indicates the instability of gendered postulates (Hall, 2023).

The perspectives of Mothers, as well as most employees at the Memorial Center, are somewhat more complex, intricate, and often self-contradictory. First, it is important to underline that not one interviewee, neither among Mothers nor among employees, denied agency constructed on motherhood. Moreover, some of them went to the extreme, claiming that this is the *only* legitimate source of motivation and foundation for building such a political identity. Some would claim it is impossible to understand the pain and positionality of Mothers if one is not a mother herself, which

circles back to my question: what about the pain of a wife for her husband, a daughter for her father, a sister for her brother (and this is only if we forget about female victims and male survivors who grieve family members)? In general, the tone in which the interviewees talked about mothers was fairly essentializing, but with interesting contradictions. For instance, on several occasions, it was made known between the lines to me, as a young unmarried girl (not in an ugly and condescending way, but unconsciously), that I could not possibly understand the Mothers, their pain, and their source of motivation, until I become a mother myself. One of the female employees who is also very present in the Association in terms of assisting Mothers, told me: "I guess you are not a mother yourself, therefore, you can't understand that." Of course, I did not find such a statement as malicious. Some things indeed cannot be comprehended unless we experience them ourselves. In addition to that, I am a post-war child, born and raised in the Tuzla Canton, where the losses of loved ones in war are significantly lower compared with people from Podrinje. But this statement indicates something else: it reserves the right to suffering, confrontation with post-genocide reality, and memory-making for mothers only. What was unspoken here, but subtly suggested, is that some *others* can *try* to replace Mothers and continue their mission, but it would not be the same in many aspects. This perspective on who can understand the Mothers was to some extent echoed by Deputy Director Amra in the following excerpt:

> Honestly, hardly anyone will have the power that the word *mother* alone has. So let's start with that first. I am a parent. I became a mother for the first time in 2007, and the moment I gave birth to my first child, I began to understand that pain, *only then*. Because you feel so much love for something that is God's and your creation. So, first, dear Allah, and then something that you carried under your heart. Something you gave birth to. Well, God willing, when you become a mother... It's impossible to express it in words. And then the question of what if someone takes it from you, kills it. You feel pain just thinking about it.

Although affirming that no one can replace the Mothers in their mission to the same extent in the future, Amra had an interesting, if somewhat contradictory, view on the positionality of the Mothers in terms of gender. She said:

> I don't think they actually positioned themselves as women, they didn't position themselves as mothers. The *gender*[16]issue did not play a role there at all. The question of gender. They are mothers, they are wives, they are daughters, sisters, *everything but that: a woman*. Because from the moment their loved ones were killed, they became both male and female, to be honest. They worked at home and did men's work, raised their children alone, the ones they had, those who were lucky enough not to have all their children killed.

This excerpt is interesting on several accounts. First, the choice to use the English term *gender,* instead of the Bosnian equivalent *rod,* is not a coincidence. As elaborated in the introduction, it indicates that the issue of gender is treated as a novelty from the West and that it is inappropriate to contextualize and transplant it into the story of the Mothers. Second, at the same time, Amra herself refutes her claim that gender does not play a role here, in the next sentence when listing all the roles of women in a patriarchal family, ending with *everything but a woman.* For her, gendering their positionality would mean to position themselves *as women*, not to position themselves with roles related to men. In that sense, motherhood remains the only legitimate standpoint from which their activism wouldn't become politicized or "gendered". As Helms argues, women from the NGO sector in Bosnia tend to identify themselves as mothers and wives to avoid the accusation that their work is "political", since politics are perceived as male and corrupted (Helms, 2013). Third, in the next sentence, she claims they became both male and female after the war, alluding to the gendered division of roles and obligations in the (earlier established) nuclear patriarchal family. This is clear from her expression, *doing men's work,* which acknowledges the burden of Mothers stepping out of their assigned roles as housewives and care workers and taking on the responsibilities that

[16] Participant used the term originally in English, although the interview was conducted completely in Bosnian and although we have a word of equivalent meaning in the language: *rod*. I reflected on this in the introduction.

belonged to their husbands before. By becoming widows, they also took on the role of *heads of the family*, but without being relieved of their "women's" pre-war duties. Amra acknowledged the unenviable position the Mothers found themselves in, which they managed to transform into a new social power, but denied that gender as a concept played a role in it. I would still argue that Amra essentially agrees that their being women was an aggravating factor, and that she expresses this precisely by mentioning their "double burden", but that her view of the English term *gender* as inappropriate expresses a distrust of Western narratives about the Mothers. She understands gender as Western-oriented feminism, instead of a social function applied in society.

Another linguistic observation necessary to bring up in this discussion is regarding the term *žena* (woman). Bosnian language contains terms for spouses (*supružnici*), offering gender specific variants: *suprug* and *supruga*, but when it comes to the gendered terms husband and wife, Bosnian lacks an equivalent for wife and uses *žena* (woman) instead. Therefore, the Bosnian version of husband and wife (*muž i žena)* has a literal meaning of husband and a woman. This is problematic in several ways. First, it indicates that the wife is the husband's property, given that the expression *moja žena* (my wife) is translated literally as my woman. One can argue that, given the language context, *žena* doesn't bring such connotation, but even subconsciously saying *moja žena* brings a possessive meaning in it. Second, this puts a sign of equality between the role of wife and the essence of woman. When a woman is still not married, she is usually called *djevojka* (a girl), and only after she marries does she earn the title *žena.* This implies that one becomes a woman only by marriage. Even when I call myself a woman, my female relatives correct me by claiming that I am not a woman *yet.* However, this is not only the case with the female gender. Unmarried men are called *momak* (a young man), but from the moment they get married, there is a term for a husband for them, unlike women. This is a historical consequence of the patriarchy-dominated

language as well. When the Mothers refer to themselves as *žene*, it is unclear if they refer to their gender identity or their marital status. This absence of alternative gender-sensitive linguistic constructions further entrenches and perpetuates essentialist notions of womanhood and motherhood.

Another point from the interview with Munira that further illustrates essentialist motherhood notions is the idea of establishing a museum of mothers. When asked to elaborate where that idea came from, she responded:

> I couldn't sleep one night and I was thinking something: screw it,[17] we don't have a museum of mothers! There is a museum of genocide, there is a museum of camp prisoners, there is a museum of fighters, a museum of this, a museum of that. But there is no mother museum. And somehow, the mother is a symbol of everything: mothers give birth, mothers create, mothers bear the greatest burden, and mothers are the greatest friends to their children. And the mother carries and creates new beings.

Aside from the interesting way of expressing her brainstorming, this idea reflects Hall's argument that maternal agency can enable and constrain simultaneously (Hall, 2023). Although the quotation above shows to what extent the Mothers perceive they get insufficient credit for their contribution to society, and how much they want to challenge that, it simultaneously reinforces the idea that the source of their agency is motherhood only. When asked about the imagined concept of it, Munira said it would be established in Sarajevo, not centered around Srebrenica Mothers, but generally Bosniak mothers, exhibiting their national costumes, traditions, and ways of living. In that sense, the museum's focus would not be the activism of the Mothers of Srebrenica, but the acknowledgement of Bosniak mothers' place in society. When Munira said everyone else has their museum except for mothers, she actually wanted to challenge the social establishment in which

[17] She used the term “jebiga“ that literally translates as “fuck it“ but doesn't have that strong meaning as in the case of English. However, this is usually not considered appropriate language for “decent women, “ but I found it a sympathetic micro-rebellion against these socially constructed norms. Mothers would never use this kind of language in public statements.

mothers are silent drivers of things, whose influence is unseen and unrecorded. Still, the idea assumes that there is only one correct recipe for being a (Bosniak) mother and that they represent a dignified and moral dimension of society.

The Mothers of Srebrenica enjoy, to some extent, the status of the moral corrective in a society. As Gavrankapetanović-Redžić formulates (Gavrankapetanović-Redžić, 2023) this, not at all naive, status warrants deeper examination. It's also not a universal case. The Mothers are sometimes the subject of accusations that they are money-driven and that they are not actually victims simply because they are not on the margins of society and poverty. This moral positioning not only shapes but also potentially harms the notion of Mothers in the public sphere, as well as the broader notions of womanhood and motherhood, as I address next.

Mothers of Srebrenica as *Mater Dolorosa*: the Image of a Crying Helpless Mother in White Šamija

Gavrankapetanović-Redžić argues that the Mothers established themselves as a corrective of political morality "in the muddy waters of Bosnian daily politics" through commitment to memory activism despite their age and positionality (Gavrankapetanović-Redžić, 2023, 141). In support of this argument, she mentions their appeal to Russian mothers not to send their sons *to die in Ukraine*, and the constant moral support they send to the mothers of Palestine. As someone who regularly follows their public statements, I confirm that the Mothers speak out on any political violence, especially those that show the characteristics of ethnic cleansing and genocide. Given that my research period is situated almost a year after October 7th 2023 when Hamas attacked Israel, which served to Israel as a justification for unprecedented violence and genocide against the Palestinians after that, the Mothers have expressed their anger that *never again* is being repeated before our eyes. Their public statements are always within the boundaries of their

principles, such as peacebuilding, respect, and rejection of hatred and revenge. Despite that, their words are often twisted and used for victim-blaming narratives. At last year's commemoration on July 11, Munira reflected on the success of the resolution passed at the UN in May of that year, but also expressed regret that Serbian President Aleksandar Vučić missed the opportunity to support it. The statement resonated in the media, and the Serbian Prime Minister Ana Brnabić falsely quoted her, claiming that Munira was threatening the lives of Vučić's children and orchestrated media attacks against her (Al Jazeera Balkans, 2024). This is not an unusual occurrence. Growing up in Bosnia, I also witnessed media attacks on the Mothers by Bosniaks as well, which leads me to the main argument of this section: the accommodation of the Virgin Mary's myth of passive suffering in the public image of Mothers, as a means of legitimizing their victimhood.

What I recognize in the public image of Mothers are the ideas of moral hierarchy of victimhood and critiques of the so-called "Madonna/Whore Complex," in a way that it combines victim-blaming in the context of genocide together with gendering of the Mother's positionality as women, but primarily mothers. For a feminist critique of the Madonna/Whore Complex, I am using the works of Marina Warner on the historical development of Virgin Mary's image as a myth of female inferiority and dependence. In her chapter *Mater Dolorosa*, she explores the image of the Lady of Sorrow, the portrayal of the Virgin Mary as a sorrowful, crying mother without agential powers and action (Warner, 2013). When it comes to the moral hierarchy of victimhood, the article "Ideal Victim" by Nils Christie investigates the social construction of victimhood in terms of what prototype of victim is more deserving of empathy and support in public discourse (Christie, 1986). According to Christie, social redistribution of legitimacy of victimhood is made under a constructed moral framework in which those weak, innocent, and passive are more deserving of

empathy than those who show agency, complexity, or resistance. In such a setting, an ideal victim lacks social status that could threaten their image as a victim (Christie, 1986). Helms also speaks about the relationship between gender, innocence, and victimhood, arguing that innocence is equated to victimhood as a way of legitimizing it (Helms, 2013). In the introduction, I spoke about my perceptions of Mothers while growing up in Bosnia and the initial shock after realizing how distorted and unjust the image of their role is. Everyone around me portrayed the Mothers as sorrowful, helpless victims. What I want to address in this section is how and why the *Dolorosa* image of Mothers is perpetuated in public discourse, and what consequences it produces. Reconsidering the innocence of the victim is, unfortunately, an unavoidable part of genocidal politics. Therefore, the constructions of ideal victims of the Bosnian genocide are not surprising, especially because responsibilities for aggression and genocide are still firmly denied. But what is interesting here is the intersection of victim portrayal with gendered notions in the example of Mothers. The image of a crying old woman in a white *šamija*[18] standing above the white *nišan*[19] and praying is the Bosniaks' version of *Mater Dolorosa*. Such an image is positioned high in the moral hierarchy of victims, and if a mother leaves that frame by acting "too political", her legitimacy of victimhood is questioned (Helms, 2013). As Christie argues, a threat to the victim's legitimacy can arise from their improvement in social status. The Mothers did not just transform themselves from passive to active agents; they also sharpened their social skills through the years, travelled a lot, and met important people, making meaningful connections and entering the social circles of academics, decision-makers, and public figures. In that sense, the social status (if not even a class) of some of them improved significantly. However, they would often find themselves targeted by the public for their travels for memory-making and lobbying, and even for seeking

[18] Traditional white headscarf, usually worn by rural older women.
[19]Muslim white gravestone.

financial compensation from the Netherlands. I remember hearing horrible comments about Munira and the other members among Bosniaks, about how they do it all for the sake of money, and how they are not the actual victims because they have a car and live a "comfortable" life. Supposedly, if you get a new car, it cancels out the fact that you buried your son and husband and survived genocide, not to mention how unfounded these comments are, considering that during my stay, Mothers complained that they did not have transportation to Potočari for certain activities. The deputy director commented that it was devastating that the Center could not provide them with even that, making the participation of the Mothers in these projects completely voluntary and at their private expense. I would often hear comments from Bosniaks about Mothers stealing donations intended for the other survivors. The biggest issue here is that these kinds of narratives about the Mothers contribute to the justification of genocide, feeding a very alive Chetnik ideology and denialist discourse today. This purification of Mothers and social punishment for those who do not fit the image of Mater Dolorosa in Potočari cemetery only works in favor of denialist discourse, in which victims deserved to be killed if they were not "innocent".

Another consequence of purified misrepresentation and establishment of that frame is diminishing the Mothers' historical role and influence, reducing them to helpless, semi-literate old women. The perpetuation of such an image in society makes it impossible to change the narrative about women's role in war in general, not just in Srebrenica. It sustains the female/passive and male/active binary way of looking toward the nineties and reinforces essential notions of womanhood and motherhood discussed in a previous section.

~~Post-Genocide~~, Genocide Never Ended: Denial and Institutionalized Violence, Experiences of Memorial Center Employees

During the summer school last July, I took a photo that quite accurately represents the reality of everyday life in Srebrenica today. The director of the Center, Emir Suljagić, took participants on a walking tour through the town to show us the landscape and conjure up pre-war life in Srebrenica.

Figure 2 Summer School of Genocide Studies, downtown in Srebrenica, July 6th 2024

Most of us were walking through the middle of the road in broad daylight, which shows how

deserted Srebrenica is (except on the eleventh of July, of course). When we stopped in front of the roundabout to listen to him, I managed to take the photo above.

What first comes to someone's attention is the director of the Memorial Center Srebrenica addressing the participants of the Summer School of Genocide Studies. The second thing that can be spotted is a monument in the middle of the roundabout in the shape of planet Earth, where children are holding hands and playing together. Although at first glance it is non-problematic, the monument is yet another result of denialist politics and an attempt to relativize the history of the nineties. The decision to build the monument was made by the Srebrenica Municipal Assembly in 2019, at the initiative of the OHR and supported by Mayor Mladen Grujičić, an outspoken genocide denier and war criminal glorifier. As the Mothers stated in their response to it, building such a monument but never coming to pay respect to the victims in the same municipality and publicly supporting genocidal Chetnik narratives, cannot be interpreted as good intentions and a step forward, but rather as an attempt at additional relativization (Karabegović & Salimović, 2020). The Mothers protested the monument precisely because it was supported by genocide deniers, one of the factors why the future of children in Srebrenica is uncertain and unpeaceful. I would reflect on the interference of the OHR as well, which initiated its construction. These steps are not an attempt at peacebuilding, and if they are, they have once again shown to what extent "peacebuilding" initiatives in Bosnia can be tasteless and have serious consequences when they are not based on contextual research and a sensitive approach. At the very least, I find this to be epistemic violence in architectural form. Suljagić speaks about architectural and geographical forms of erasing and rewriting history in RS, in his book *The Geography of Disappearance,* where he argues that these attempts to transform the landscape are politics of denial and rewriting of history (Suljagić, 2021).

The next thing in the photo that catches the viewer's attention is a billboard behind Suljagić's back. The picture expresses gratitude in a picturesque way to the UN member states that voted against the resolution on the Srebrenica genocide at the UN General Assembly in May 2024. On one side is the total number of states that voted against (19), those that abstained (68), and the others that did not vote (21). The total number is written as 109, although the sum of the previous three numbers equals 108, because they included the RS as a state. On the other side, several states voted for the resolution (84), which is shown as a minority. Above them are the flags of Germany, the USA, Croatia, and the war flag of the Republic of BiH, which has not been in official use since 1998, and which symbolizes the Federation here.[20] Manipulation of numbers aside, the narrative of this billboard is that the Serbian people "remember" the injustice done to them, repeating the phrase that went viral before the resolution was voted on: "we are not a genocidal people", although no one made this accusation either in public discourse or in the text of the resolution itself. As a visual divider between the two groups of states, there is a pen dripping ink, symbolizing "remembering". These billboards appeared all over Serbia and the RS after the resolution was passed, including in Srebrenica.

What is not visible in the picture due to the angle is a row of small RS flags hung on every lamppost throughout the town. These are not temporary. Whenever I visited Srebrenica, I would see them. RS is known for marking its territory with flags on every inch, as a part of the "geography of disappearance" (Suljagić, 2021). Now, let us imagine we are Bosniaks living in Srebrenica today, not the visitors. We would get up in the morning, sit in the car and start driving to work, passing by the billboard described and a bunch of RS flags at each step, as well as the monument, landscape

[20] The Federation, unlike the RS, does not have its own flag.

sending us a message that we are not welcome and safe here. This is the everyday reality of Bosniak returnees. As Suljagić said during the interview, Srebrenica seems as if it is still 1993:

> Each of those people returned there by choice. And none of them blame anyone else for coming to live there. But life there is still a life at the front. When you're in Sarajevo, it's literally like any other city in Central or Eastern Europe. You can drink the same kind of coffee, find the same kind of hotel, and so on. And then you drive two and a half hours from there, and literally, two and a half hours later, you're back in 1993. There are no guns, and there's no shooting, but the pressure is much higher, the stakes are much higher. So, when you are there, you are made aware at every step that you are a second-class citizen, from street names to handling at the counter in the post office, and what our people should know is that we are still fighting battles that have ended for them.

Many employees, as well as the Mothers, share the same experiences and feelings about living in Srebrenica today. Many of them mentioned that they would probably never have lived in Srebrenica if fate had not destined them differently. Most are highly educated people who aspire to live in metropolises and claim that they are only there for their mission, which is more important to them than a comfortable life. There is not one bakery in Srebrenica, just one market, and one pharmacy with limited working time; no coffee shops, city malls, nothing. Before the war, Srebrenica was a much livelier city, which had a larger number of inhabitants and attracted tourists with sources of high-mineral waters located above the center. Deputy Director Amra talked about her son, who is starting 8th grade this year, where he will be learning from the newly adopted textbooks for history in the RS with the teaching unit "Republika Srpska and the Homeland War". In this unit, convicted war criminals Karadžić and Mladić are depicted as founding members of the state, and there is not a word about the crimes and genocide committed on the territory of the RS. She expressed her fear that he would risk his safety if he reacted in class. She said: "This is all terrible. Imagine Hitler being taught as a hero."

When it comes to the Mothers and their reality, the situation is pretty much the same, if not worse. Some of them, like Munira, live in Sarajevo and travel to Srebrenica almost weekly when needed.

Still, those who returned permanently experience a different reality, growing old and in constant need of someone taking care of them, having accessible healthcare, and so on. When we consider that social policies are not implemented in the Federation either, the situation is simply unimaginable in the RS, especially in a half-empty, dysfunctional city like Srebrenica. Azir, a curator at the Memorial Center, spoke about the reception Bosniaks receive in health and administrative institutions. Their rights are often denied or ignored, no Bosniak works in the municipality or any other body of the state apparatus, and the only institution where they can actually get a job is the Memorial Center (which has a very small budget even for current employees). Many interviewees said that the Mothers did the work of the state in many aspects. This sounds like an overstatement at first, although in certain segments it is true, and this is one of those. Mothers spoke in interviews about the social role they have played in the returnee community since the first day of organizing the return: from raising funds, renovating and equipping destroyed houses, and providing scholarships and education to Srebrenica children. On my third or fourth day of stay, they prepared groceries and meat, together with a monetary donation for a family with a child with disability, in a remote part of the Srebrenica municipality. One of the Center employees drove them, and they visited the family for coffee, listening to their needs and giving them a donation.. However, when it comes to the effectiveness of social policies, especially towards people with disabilities, they are equally poor, if not non-existent, for all citizens (Brković, 2017).

To conclude, the reality of Bosniaks living in RS today, especially in Srebrenica, is not easy or safe at all. The very fact that they live in a political entity that was created through ethnic cleansing and genocide, and defined in Dayton itself as primarily the territory of Serbs, is enough for non-Serb returnees and survivors to not feel safe. Imagine if someone had formed a Nazi entity after World

War II and set out to convince Jews that the foundations of such a political formation were legitimate and not problematic at all. Now and then, crimes of hate and intolerance occur: on Orthodox Christmas, Serbs in Srebrenica regularly patrol in cars with flags, singing Chetnik songs. Recently, together with a priest, they poured concrete crosses on the Muslim cemetery that we visited during the summer school. It is a cemetery in a deserted and ethnically cleansed village of Bosniaks where no one lives, but the Serb Orthodox Church decided to build a church across from the cemetery, although it is a village on a hill with no residents, especially Orthodox Christians (K., 2025). Suljagić showed us this church during summer school as an example of the geography of disappearance. When the hate crime of vandalizing the cemetery occurred in January, the comments I heard among Bosniaks living in the Federation were blaming the Bosniak population in RS as weak and "without a spine", calling them cowards for never resisting in such incidents. Detached from reality, such comments show to what extent the Bosniak population is divided in every sense, not just geographically.

Fractured Bosniak Identity: Disunity, Internal Hatred, and Sarajevocentrism

Through the sections so far, one can sense the deep devastation of the Bosniak people, as a direct consequence of the unhealed wound of the nineties. It is natural for a society to go through such a phase after genocide, but what I am witnessing today in Bosnia is a status quo from which it becomes impossible to get out. Nations that survive genocide often go through a phase of national awakening, even nationalism, where the common wound becomes the basis for the formation of a common political identity (Halbwachs, 1992). This did not happen to the Bosniaks. Sometimes I struggle to even recognize healthy doses of patriotism, in a society that suffers from Stockholm syndrome on a collective level and suppresses all fragments of its identity so as not to "provoke". It is understandable when victims develop such behavior as a trauma response, but this is also an

approach adopted by Bosniak politicians, building their rhetoric on victimhood. If I had to describe the current status of Bosniaks in one sentence, it would be: everyone hates everyone. We are divided either on account of religion (religious Muslims or non-religious people), then we are divided as voters of political parties, as residents of either rural or urban communities, and in terms of geography. It is not just that Bosniaks of the Federation do not have a sense of community with returnees in RS, but Bosniaks from different Cantons also do not feel a sense of shared reality.

On top of that, there is something I refer to as Sarajevocentrism, the disease that afflicts the Bosniak epicenter of culture and state-building politics, capital Sarajevo. Studying and living for four years in Canton Sarajevo, and following the political affairs in the news daily, I witnessed very problematic views towards any political or social issue that is beyond the Sarajevo valley. In recent years, many state-building policies have been compromised and stalled by Bosniak representatives to gain some personal advantage. All the focus on economic, social, and other policies is in Sarajevo, partly as a consequence of the Dayton arrangement and the cantonal level of government, and mostly due to the neglect of the rest of the entities (and especially the state). Although my place of residence is quite developed, the years of study in Sarajevo felt like studying in another, more developed state. The best example of the disunity of Bosniak politics is precisely the fact that the mayor of Srebrenica is a declared Chetnik and that every four years in the local elections, the Bosniak parties refuse to propose a joint candidate to oppose him. There are always at least two candidates, and no coalition wants to withdraw its own for the common good of Bosniaks, because the welfare of the party is more important than the state. I had to conclude this many times in my life, explaining to myself the ridiculous moves of the Bosniak opportunist "representatives". Showing up on July 11th is another parade of arrogance and false compassion. It was dystopian to watch the empty city on the first days of summer school and then witness a convoy of luxury state

cars with officials from Sarajevo, around which journalists jostle to get a statement and a picture. Every year, the *Peace March* is traditionally held, a three-day hike through the forest route through which survivors fled to safe territory (those who survived). It is a physically demanding but bonding experience that brings together several thousand volunteers every year, from elderly survivors to youth. Associations, organizations, and individuals prepare refreshments, assistance, and camps for participants who have to stick to the schedule in order to arrive at Potočari in the afternoon hours on July 10th. We were waiting for their arrival last year, but they were late at least two hours because a Bosniak member of the Presidency, Denis Bećirević, decided last-minute to give them a speech on the hill, just before Potočari. In an air-conditioned car and a suit, Bećirević climbed the hill and spoke to the group of several thousand tired, hungry, and thirsty people sitting in the sun, at a temperature of 37 degrees, whose schedules had been disrupted. The next day, I watched the federal minister of internal affairs, Ramo Isak, taking selfies at the cemetery. He left Potočari in his helicopter that evening, which he filmed and posted on his Instagram story. It was my first funeral, and I was disgusted. I can't even imagine what it must be like for the victims' families coming every year to attend the funeral and watching the parade of foreign and domestic officials who use the occasion for self-promotion. This is how the life of returnees and survivors in RS looks like today.

This chapter aimed to form a bigger picture for the reader and situate my research in a very lively, not post-genocide, but by many parameters, genocidal context in which Bosniaks in RS live today. In the next chapter, I present the first part of my research outcome and discuss it in the context of collective memory, gender, and the ways in which memorialization is being established.

CHAPTER 3 – GENDERED GENOCIDE – GENDERED MEMORY

The purpose of this chapter is to present research findings related to women's, specifically the Mothers', memory and memory-making processes and analyze them in the discussion with historical and contemporary contexts. In addition, I aim to present silences and gaps in recent history related to the women of Srebrenica that interviewees brought up during my research. This chapter deals with the construction of memory in its gendered format, establishing the ground for shifting the focus towards the future in the last chapter.

Gendered Genocide: The Survivors Build the Narrative, and the Survivors are Women

In response to my question about the importance of women's memory of genocide in Srebrenica, Suljagić used the term 'gendered genocide'. He emphasized the importance of their memory, that is, in his opinion, a huge portion of Bosniak memory of war in general, aside from Srebrenica. What Suljagić refers to as 'gendered genocide' is something I already acknowledged earlier as a historical consequence of the Serb architecture of genocide, which strategically intended different destinies for different genders among Bosniaks. Unlike in the Holocaust, on which Raphael Lemkin's definition of genocide itself was based, the political leadership of the RS and Serbian regime in Belgrade decided to kill mainly men (with exceptions), while forcibly displacing women and (mostly female) children from Srebrenica. In today's denialist discourse, this fact is often used to justify genocide, claiming that genocide is the killing of civilians, while in Srebrenica, only men were killed, not perceiving them as civilians in the same way as women and children, because of the gendered notion of who is a civilian.

This is where women (among them Mothers) appeared on the scene as a factor of complications and disruption of their plans. I always wondered the following: if Ratko Mladić and Radovan

Karadžić had known that 'helpless', 'illiterate' women whom they did not consider a threat would send them to The Hague, would they have decided to kill them too? Would today the genocide in Srebrenica be known at all, would there be any survivors, and finally, what would be the consequences for Bosnia in general? Thinking along these lines, the biggest mistake of the nationalist genocidal apparatus was that it was also sexist: failing to see the real threat in women survivors was what caused some of the main 'heroes' to be sent to prison. Nationalist ideology, hand in hand with patriarchy, did not even perceive women as someone with agency and autonomy, and therefore a threat to the extermination of the Bosniaks. The logic consisted of perceiving the community destroyed when its men were exterminated, regardless of whether the women survived, since it was a patriarchal, traditional community (2004). These calculations proved invalid when the women survivors and refugees of Srebrenica decided to take matters into their own hands. Whether their motivation was to break the centuries-old passivity of women in the community or whether their resistance stemmed from an essential understanding of motherhood and conjugal life is a topic that I briefly touched on in the previous chapter, together with previous feminist works. Still, they found this source of energy to confront those who thought that the memory of the Srebrenica massacre would die with them and their remaining descendants, without ever being acknowledged and punished for it. Kada Hotić, vice president of the Association and one of the oldest members, began speaking with the following quote when asked if the future of women's memory of genocide is important:

> Yes, of course. I am an orphan[21] from World War II. My mother did not fight to find out why my father died in 1945, right before the end of the war. The body was never found, and there is no one in the grave. I was born up to a month after him. And my father seems not to have existed, but I exist. That is one big puzzle.

[21] The reason why Kada refers to herself as an orphan, although her mother was alive, is that, according to Islamic teachings, one is considered an orphan if one does not have a father (a provider). By losing mother, one does not become an orphan. This aligns with the patriarchal perception of who is an orphan as well.

Kada's disclosure of the fact that she had experienced the consequences of war crimes against civilians twice in her life left a deep impression on me. During World War II and the establishment of the Nazi puppet state of the Independent State of Croatia, many Bosniaks and Serbs were killed and disappeared. Unfortunately, the figures of those killed are largely unreliable because many crimes are not documented. Kada's sentence illustrates that, as well as the marginalization of women in the 20th century, being in the shadow of social currents. She nevertheless highlighted this as the reason why she decided to end what she considered the female passivity on her mother's side and find out what happened to her son, husband, and her brothers.

Talking about women's memory, one of the archivists, Merima Mujičić, referred to the same fact as Suljagić, that almost the entire memory of the genocide is women's. The burden of discovering the truth, preserving memory, and re-establishing the community fell on the backs of women who were invisible before the war in the male-dominated Bosnian society, as Merima said. "If some cannot fight, then there are others. In this case, the "others" were women." Merima implied here that women took over responsibilities and activities previously assigned to men, which means they also took over the narrative. Suljagić also elaborated on this further:

> Well, I don't know what the exact narrative would be if there weren't them. I don't think we could even talk about any other narrative at all. That is, setting up any narrative, if there wasn't a women's one, if there wasn't women's memory.

These excerpts from Suljagić's and Mujičić's interviews illustrate the conclusion of this section: survivors build the narrative, and survivors are women. Therefore, it is simply impossible to talk about the memory of the Srebrenica genocide without centering the women's experiences in it. In this case, it is once again the Mothers who have greatly contributed to the formation of the narrative and who are still working to establish and maintain the memory today. In the following section, I

analyze the complexities of Mothers' memory-making and how it intertwines with that established by the Memorial Center.

The Association and the Memorial Center as Main Actors in Establishing Memory and Narrative

As mentioned in the previous chapter, in addition to the initial goal of finding family members and establishing facts, the Mothers also established memory-making as their mission and priority. When it comes to establishing a collective memory of genocide and war atrocities, scholars focus on the institutionalization of memory in terms of establishing war museums and memorials, but also on the contribution of victims to the process. Still, as presented in the literature review, when it comes to Srebrenica, the focus is kept on the institutions, while the works on Mothers mostly center around their activism and motherhood as a political identity. This gap in the literature, which this thesis seeks to fill, creates ambiguity regarding the role of women in the formation of narratives and the maintenance of memory. Johanna Mannergren Selimović explores encounters between global and local actors in the establishment and institutionalization of memory, emphasizing that, in addition to the previous two categories, there are the victims themselves (Selimovic, 2013). Selimović argues that victims' involvement differs in various instances and that their motives for establishing and contributing to the memory can stem from other personal reasons than just maintaining collective memory, such as having a physical place to visit and visualize their memory and trauma (Selimovic, 2013). Her argument is reflected in the work of Sarah Wagner (2010), who argues that the reason for the Mothers' and victims' insistence on Potočari as a cemetery location goes beyond forcing the international community to acknowledge their complicity in genocide. It was also an attempt to transform the landscape as a physical and geographical healing of wounds, along with the physical documentation of the scale of killing as

a counter to Bosnian Serb denials (Wagner, 2010, 65). Wagner and Selimović present how victims' motives for participation and presence in these processes are sometimes personal and complex. However, Selimović only discusses one of the ways in which victims contribute to such spaces, in her other article about Sarajevo museums, and it is donating personal objects (Selimović, 2022, 14). As an archivist, Merima confirmed that the Mothers donated lots of materials and personal objects to the Center's archive, emphasizing that it is a lot of written and documented material. When it comes to personal objects, Azir Osmanović, the curator of the Memorial Museum, spoke more about it, saying that most of the items he collected so far for the collection of personal items of victims were donated by the Mothers. These items are then exhibited as part of a museum installation whose aim is to show the lives of the victims and their identities before the genocide. Azir also emphasized that the Mothers contribute to memory in other ways as well. However, when I asked him about those different ways, he started talking about their advocacy regarding the establishment of the Memorial Center and lobbying the OHR in the 2000s to legally ensure the center's status. Although, of course, the work on the establishment of such an institution is a kind of laying the foundation for long-term memory, it does not tell us much about the Mothers' activities that specifically concern the establishment and maintenance of collective memory. I did not get much input from the employees on this. Their responses acknowledged the work and results of the Mothers; however, when asked about specific projects by the Mothers or projects in which the Memorial Center involves them, they mostly mentioned donating objects or giving interviews for an oral history project. In both examples, the role of the Mothers is passive, while the Memorial staff use the materials received from them, be it personal objects or testimonies given, to shape the narrative. When it comes to interviews with Mothers, they provided more insight into their activities of memory-making, but as an inseparable part of other activist initiatives. International

trips to spread awareness were mentioned in passing. Munira talked about lobbying for a resolution in the European Parliament a few years ago, and also about their involvement in lobbying for the international one, voted on last year, and which I briefly mentioned in the previous chapter. She said:

> Every 11th is commemorated in front of the European Parliament, flags are at half-mast… We know how many people work in Brussels, how many work in Strasbourg, and how many people will come that day and ask what this flag is. So, it is a memory. Then our memory, our flower, a symbol, which will be placed in front of the United Nations, and will be placed in all the cities of the world.

This excerpt shows that the Mothers are aware of all the ways in which it is possible to develop awareness and a culture of remembrance. Munira's observation about the flag in front of the EU Parliament illustrates the memory-bound outcomes of their activism. As for the archiving aspect of the Association, the materials exist mostly in their original form, with some of them converted into electronic versions. Šehida Abdurahmanović, a board member, commented that they are trying to provide as much of their materials as possible in electronic format for convenience, but that there is a lot of that. The Association's headquarters, where I stayed in September 2024, consists of two houses. The first house, which functions as the Mothers' residence when they are in Potočari, and where I also stayed, is littered with pictures, books, awards, and letters of appreciation. The house across the yard, which serves more as an office and storage, also contains a lot of materials. I found their other office, which is in the administrative part of the Memorial Center, in a similar condition. It has many pictures of officials who have come to funerals over the past decades, and pictures from the Mothers' international travels. The Association's webpage contains an electronic database of lots of materials.[22] When it comes to visuals, there is a gallery of images, such as the Book of Memories, and a press gallery that contains clippings from the local

[22] https://www.enklave-srebrenica-zepa.org/ Last accessed: May 4th, 2025

press[23]. In the section "Documents of significance", there are 20 documents in Bosnian, and 11 when the page is translated into English. These documents are different; Bosnian ones are not translated into English versions and vice versa, which is why there is such a division. In the English version, these are mostly letters and thanks to officials or vice versa that are written in English in their original form. The documents in Bosnian are more factual, of various kinds, such as historical information about the genocide, documented threats to the Mothers, lists of people present at the UN base on July 13, 1995, and similar[24]. What the English version does not contain at all is a link to the lists of victims, sorted by burial dates (of those found), that the Bosnian one has.[25] In addition, the Bosnian version provides a link to the 360-degree virtual museum, which is a project of the media company Al Jazeera Balkans.[26]

Taking all this into account, I would argue that the Mothers rather provide sources and conditions for memory to be made than actually participate in the memorialization process equally as the Memorial Center. Although they participate in certain projects of collective memory and build their own archives, their greatest contribution in this area is providing the arena and conditions for memory-making, through activism and lobbying, whose outcomes are, in addition to concrete successes, also the spread of awareness and memory. In that way, Mothers, through their activism, lay the foundation and provide a space in which the Memorial Center can then establish and shape a narrative for memorialization processes. However, it is not clear to what extent this "taking over of the raw materials" by the Center, from which memory is then produced, centers women's memory and the work of Mothers. As I mentioned above, the employees did not have any concrete examples when asked about projects that directly involve Mothers. Moreover, when I asked about

[23] https://www.enklave-srebrenica-zepa.org/multimedia.php Last accessed: May 4th, 2025
[24] https://www.enklave-srebrenica-zepa.org/dokumenti.php Last accessed: May 4th, 2025
[25] https://www.enklave-srebrenica-zepa.org/zrtvegenocida/ Last accessed: May 4th, 2025
[26] https://www.srebrenica360.com/ Last accessed: May 4th, 2025

projects that focus on women's experiences and roles, they all answered negatively, some mentioning that it was an idea for future projects, and some were surprised by the idea of the experiences being separated. The impression I got from most of the interviews is that when they claim that the memory of the Mothers must be kept alive, they are more aiming at the oral collective memory among the people and the memory of their tragic destiny as mothers without children. The unspoken feeling was that the story of the Mothers does not belong in the Memorial Center except in the context of the victim, because the Center focuses on the memory of the victims and the historical facts of the genocide. However, this is what appears contradictory: the activism and role of the Mothers *is* a historical fact of the genocide.

To critically reflect on this, it is necessary to briefly situate the Memorial Center in the production of memory. First, the type of memory that the Memorial Center, as a genocide museum, produces is what scholarship refers to as *cosmopolitan memory*. The term was coined by Daniel Levy and Natan Sznaider, defining it as a new form of collective memory emerging in a global context and transcending ethnic and national boundaries (Levy & Sznaider, 2002). Later, in their book *The Holocaust and Memory in the Global Age*, Levy and Sznaider investigated the nature of collective memory in a globalized world, in terms of how the memory of the Holocaust has been territorially detached and constructed as a global cosmopolitan memory, and established as a template for interpreting contemporary acts of ethnic cleansing and genocide (Levy & Sznaider, 2006). Memorial sites and museums of war atrocities and genocide tend to adopt such a de-territorial approach in their production of memory that is being labeled as cosmopolitan. Nayanika Mookherjee (2011) calls this *genocidal cosmopolitanism.* Mookherjee investigates the effective aesthetics of such museums, with a focus on the trope ‘never again’ which verbalizes the search for legal and moral justice for crimes against humanity committed in the twentieth and twenty-

first centuries (Mookherjee, 2011). Levy and Szneider present the trope of 'never again' as an indicator that the defining feature of cosmopolitan memory is its future-oriented dimension, in which memory serves not only to create a myth about the past, but to visualize and embody the need to prevent future crimes of genocidal intent (Levy & Sznaider, 2002, 101-102). 'Never again' is quite common in commemorative phrases and expressions about the Srebrenica genocide. When I was younger, I thought it was strictly related to Srebrenica and Bosnia. There is a *duaa* (Muslim prayer) that is recited every year after the funeral in Potočari, and that is also engraved as a verse in stone in the cemetery complex. It ends with the following words:

> *We pray to You, God, that sorrow be hope; That revenge be justice; that a mother's tear be prayer; that Srebrenica never happens to anyone again!*

The verse has become mainstream over the years, with people quoting it on social media on July 11th and in commemorative occasions. I first encountered it as an expression, only later learning that it was the end of a prayer. Reis[27] Husein Kavazović's recitation of these verses at last year's funeral, which was also attended by Palestinian journalist Motaz Azaiza, and amid the ongoing genocide against Palestinians, remains etched as a dystopian image in my memory. This shows to what extent the mission of cosmopolitan memory remains a utopian one.

Returning to the Center itself, and taking into account the previously presented works of scholars, it is important to understand the center's practices and ways of establishing memory in the context of cosmopolitan memory and genocidal cosmopolitanism. The design of the museum's displays at the Center can be labeled as what Mookherjee describes as the ‘effective aesthetic of genocidal horror’ (Mookherjee, 2011). The photographs are often in black and white, and the space is designed to induce claustrophobia, with dark walls and dim lighting focused on what is on display. The concept of the exhibition is such that it causes discomfort in visitors and awakens empathy

[27] A Muslim religious leader, in this context the head of the Islamic Community of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

towards the victims. However, what is distinctive about the Memorial Center is the location itself, which serves as an open-air museum in the same way as the Auschwitz concentration camp. The Center's Public Relations Manager, Almasa Salihović, highlighted this fact during an interview, saying that the complex itself is a museum exhibit because of the Dutch Battalion building, where many Muslim men took shelter before being taken by Serb soldiers and mass-executed. The idea of transforming the former Dutch battalion into a memorial complex with a museum and an educational center originated again with the Mothers, who requested it from the SDA and OHR. Initially, both actors opposed the idea, calling it undesirable and unrealistic, but only after the Mothers began organizing the return to Srebrenica that they realized the importance of creating such a space for returnees (Pollack, 2003). From this example, it is once again visible that Mothers provided the ground and necessary conditions for memory to be made today.

Director Suljagić highlighted that the focus of the Memorial Center is not on the criminals but on the victims. The primary mission of the institution is to preserve a dignified and undistorted memory of them, then work to preserve historical facts, including those concerning perpetrators. In this modus operandi, the Center in Potočari follows the trend of genocidal cosmopolitanism, centering the victim in the story. This could potentially explain why the Center does not incorporate memory of women's experiences and Mothers' activism into its projects on a larger scale, but only in the context of victimhood. Although this could serve as an explanation, it can hardly serve as an excuse. Of course, pictures in the museum portray women being forcefully displaced, but it is incorporated in a general narrative of victim experience, without highlighting women's struggles separately. There is not very much about sexual violence either, which is a big taboo even today. Likewise, an oral history project that centers on women's experiences of rebuilding life in Srebrenica after the genocide would not necessarily undermine a framework that focuses on the

victim and survivor. Therefore, the reasoning of employees regarding the marginalization of women's voices in the narratives of the Center, especially the voices of women who fought for its establishment, was not sufficient for me. Most of them offered semi-satisfactory explanations, such as that the experiences of victims should not be categorized according to gender or that Mothers are highly valued, even though there are no projects addressing their role. The general impression created during the summer school and the research period is that we are again dealing with an "old problem" on a societal level, which is leaving women's experiences and contributions to languish in the shadows, unacknowledged, whether consciously or unconsciously. I do not shift the blame only to the Memorial Center, but I believe that Bosnian (Bosniak)[28] society, including the women themselves in it, is accustomed to such a setting of things that even when it advocates change in theory, it does not see how much in practice it operates according to old patterns. What appears most problematic for me here is that Mothers who fought from the beginning for the establishment of the Center are now excluded from the decision-making processes about the memory establishment. I investigate the relationship between the Association and the Memorial Center more deeply in the next chapter, together with its power inequalities, but I also have to reflect on that to some point here as well. What seems ironic, is that most of the employees, even the director himself, pointed out that the narrative is built by women and it depends on women, but at the same time, it is clear from the projects of the Center that this institution is the biggest actor in this process, which is also visible from the fact that almost all scholarly works on memorialization address the Center, not the Association. It seems that the power and importance employees and management put on the Mothers as actors is de facto a ceremonial and symbolic kind, *Mater*

[28] The reason for bringing up both sometimes, is that in certain instances I do not find something characteristic only of Bosniaks as ethnic group, but Bosnians and neighbouring people in general (Balkan is too general for me). Elissa Helms argues that all competing nationalisms in the Balkans are built on similar gender regimes (2013).

Doloresa, that more acknowledges the high status "deserved" in the past, than the actual power and agency they still hold. The central question arises here: Who gets to own the memory? Who gets to decide about it? Suljagić said women made the narrative, and they are the ones who will shape it in the future, but is it truly like that in reality and the decision-making arena? He is a male survivor of genocide who was a teenager in the years of the siege and whose family members were killed. This is what makes him 'legitimate' for the position of the director, and what fuels him to develop the institution further. Although he is a survivor himself, he is a male one, and has significant power to decide about the memory he claims has been established by women, specifically Mothers. As a director, together with the steering committee, he is the one who has the final word in decision-making processes of the Center, including those regarding memorialization. He is in a position to make choices in terms of prioritizing specific projects and, therefore, prioritizing certain aspects of narrative, while marginalizing others. Looking at the matter through these lenses, one can see the gendering and power inequality of the relationship between the Association and the Center. There is plenty of irony when a man speaks about the importance of women's memory and women's involvement in decision-making processes, while at the same time performing the function of the highest authority of an institution that excludes them from the same process. The institution that was established in the way it was established, thanks to the Mothers, does not emphasize this fact today through its museum displays and projects. All employees have uncompromisingly confirmed that the activism and contribution of the Mothers should never be forgotten. Still, that opinion in theory does not reflect the situation in practice. When one visits the museum complex in Potočari, there is no way to find out that the cause of all this is the Mothers who collected signatures for a petition and argued with high-profile politicians more than 20 years ago.

Silences and Gaps in Memory

Independent of my questions, participants repeatedly mentioned specific segments of the history of the Association, but also the history of the women of Srebrenica before the fall of the enclave in July 1995. I decided to address their input on things that are quite absent and unacknowledged in the collective memory of the Srebrenica war years. Several of them addressed the issue of missing the opportunity to record a first-hand memory: many mothers (as well as survivors) died without recording at least one oral testimony. In that sense, many experiences and stories were lost without being recorded.

Here, I briefly discuss the oral history project in the center and then group the inputs on the experiences and activities of women during and after the war in Srebrenica into three categories, which participants claimed are not sufficiently acknowledged and processed in the collective memory, but to some extent also in history. What they were referring to when they said history mostly refers to the collective narrative in society and popular literature. The problem with foreign literature is that it is mostly not translated from English and not sold in bookstores in Bosnia. In addition, people in Bosnia do not cultivate a culture of reading academic works, except for academic circles at universities. Also, the culture of reading e-books is quite weak. Because of this, the older generations, especially those who do not know English the language, are doomed to read only what is in the bookstore. Putting things this way, I have never found a source about Mothers and their role in Bosnian that can be purchased anywhere.

First, I will briefly reflect on the problem of the belated approach to oral history, which was discussed during the interview with Hasan Hasanović, a coordinator of the oral history project at the Memorial Center. Hasan pointed out that the Center approached oral history, as well as many other projects, quite late, due to the organization of work that preceded the mandate of Emir

Suljagić. Hasan claimed that with his arrival, the oral history project was raised to a higher level. He talked about how he used to do it alone, what he now does together with 4-5 people, and how it took him years of researching and studying to build capacity for approaching interviewers professionally. “As soon as a person dies, it's the end,” he said, elaborating on the fact that many survivors died, and with them their stories and experiences that failed to be woven into the collective memory.

Joan Sangster argues that oral history should perceive gender as a defining category of analysis, claiming that women often remember the past differently than men (Sangster, 1994, 7). Therefore, oral history occupies an important place in the collective memory of genocide, in which the survivors are mostly women. Without oral history as a method, in this case, the memory and historical narrative of the genocide remains incomplete because it omits the voices of those who are first-hand witnesses and forms a rigid, distanced narrative. Hassan pointed out that their oral history project is still in development. When asked about incorporating feminist methods into their approaches, he emphasized that the Center is willing to adopt anything that will advance the approach as long as it is within the “context and tradition.” I interpreted this in the same way as Amra's emphasis on the English version of the word gender, as animosity and fear of Western narratives that allude to epistemic violence through the use of decontextualized terms. Hasan also added that they would like to interview women victims of rape in the future, but that for that they would need a female interviewer and a much more sensitive approach. He expressed the desire to develop oral history on a higher level and to build a huge database of interviews in the Center that would be available to academics for research. I join him in that wish.

The following sections address the unacknowledged women's activism during the siege of Srebrenica from 1992, the absence of historical works exploring the protests of 1995-1996, and

the petition and advocacy for the location of today's Memorial Center. Although the aforementioned topics have been addressed to some extent in scholarship, the topics about women of Srebrenica usually revolve around genocide and post-genocide context, and mostly focus on the Mothers. When it comes to books and general publications about the genocide in the Bosnian language, the focus is always on the victims. There is not a single book in Bosnian that specifically deals with the Mothers, their Association, and their historical role. Everything is left to informal and oral ways of knowledge. This is, of course, a general problem of omitting the history of genocide and war from the curriculum of the educational system in the Federation. In the RS, of course, it is further from utopia, due to the counter-narrative in school history textbooks as a continuing genocidal policy. This is especially the case with the history of the women of Srebrenica during the siege. This issue again comes back to what I highlighted in the previous sections, which is that the voices and experiences of women are collectively ignored and exist only somewhere in the background.

Unacknowledged Women's Activism During the Siege

When asked about the Srebrenica women's activism after the war, most Mothers pointed out that it did not begin just then, but that they had formed *Aktiv žena* (Women's collective)[29] during the war in besieged Srebrenica, already in 1992. As Munira recalled, women organized themselves to contribute to the survival of the siege in many ways:

> Some women decided to help the wounded, others decided to go to some houses to look for stuff, because the criminals had looted everything, the whole of Srebrenica, we didn't even have a regular bandage anymore, so we asked the women who would give us a sheet to make bandages, then we taught ourselves how to bandage wounds, since there weren't enough medics. Others watched when a grenade or something fell, to clean [the debris away], and others helped the elderly. There was a very large number of old, helpless people who couldn't

[29] Aktiv is a word coming from the former Yugoslav context that refers to a formally organized collective in community with a certain purpose, similar to today's understanding of NGO's but mostly on voluntary basis.

> somehow get water for themselves, because in Srebrenica, there wasn't even enough air, let alone anything else. Hunger was rampant, people were dying from small wounds, so in a way, we really got involved and we really gave our all. Our job and our work didn't start in 1996 when we registered as a movement. We had already been involved since 1992.

It is evident from the excerpt above that Munira does not consider the roots of the Association to be the 1995 protests in Tuzla, but rather women's activism during the war. A similar view was shared by Šehida, board member, who said that she thought that they had exhausted the strength for self-organization and the protests in Tuzla, exactly from their previous organization in the besieged Srebrenica. Aktiv Žena was founded by Fatima Husejnović, who is remembered as the woman who imprisoned UNPROFOR General Philippe Morillon in the post office building in 1993, demanding that he declare Srebrenica a free zone so that convoys of humanitarian aid, food, and medicine could enter the city (Sarajevo Times, 2024).

It would be wrong to assume that the Women's Action consisted only of those we now call the Mothers. Many women in Srebrenica at the time participated in various ways, which means that the Mothers' narrative is a dominant one that marginalizes the experiences of other women. In the digital archive of the Center, there is a database of oral history interviews called “Oral History: Lives Behind the Field of Death.”[30] Since both female and male interviewees are contained together in the database, I reviewed a portion of the interviews to see the scope of different experiences. Different experiences were not just present among men, but also among women, unlike the mainstream memory of the unique female experience of motherhood and loss. For instance, Fatima Klempić Dautbašić, a gynecologist who spent the entire war working in the military hospital in Srebrenica, focused on her experience as a doctor, not just as a survivor, talking about performing surgeries without anesthetics, the pain of her wounded patients, and her attempts to help them even off duty and during the escape.

[30] https://zivotiizapoljasmrti.srebrenicamemorial.org/ Last date accessed: May 21st, 2025.

I draw two conclusions here. First, very little is known about the Aktiv žena, and there are not enough sources about it, especially in the Bosnian language. This creates the impression that the activism of Srebrenica women only began in 1995. Second, the maintenance of a mainstream narrative in which the women of Srebrenica are equated with the Mothers and their activism leaves very little space for other experiences that do not identify with motherhood. In this sense, these two are what I would call the gap and the silence in the history of Srebrenica women.

Absence of Historical Sources on Protests of 1995–1996 in Tuzla

Another gap that I want to reflect on is the protests in 1995-1996 Tuzla that many consider the birth of the Mothers' Association. After arriving in safe territory, several thousand women decided to block the streets of Tuzla and demand an investigation from the authorities. I briefly introduced this period in the second chapter, but now I am looking back at it again as a gap in history. It is almost impossible to find sources and literature that deal with it, without it being a passing sentence in an article about the Association, and there are not even any articles or pictures about it on their website. Šehida talked most about it, expressing her wish to see a publication on the history of the Mothers' movement (in the Bosnian language). The protests were also mentioned by most of the employees during the interviews, which indicates that the memory of them is present in the collective memory of the people of Srebrenica, but that it is again absent from the projects that seek to establish long-term memory. As I mentioned earlier, when visiting the Memorial Center, it is impossible to find out anything about the protests, the 2001 petition, or the Association in general. Azir pointed out that for this year's commemoration (2025), they are preparing a large exhibition on the occasion of the 30th anniversary of the genocide and that they plan, among other things, to include the history of the Mothers' movement as part of that exhibition. Let's hope that this part will also cover the aspect of the 1995 protests and the 2001 petition. However, what he

did not confirm is whether it will be a permanent or temporary exhibition. All the exhibitions and art installations that I managed to find that were realized by the Memorial Center in previous years, and that touch upon women's experiences, have, unfortunately, been temporary or traveling exhibitions. Therefore, this is another moment in the history of genocide, one of the most crucial, I would argue, that needs to be "unsilenced".

Mother's Role in Locating and Establishing the Memorial Center

The last "gap" I want to address is the one all of the interviewees mentioned, with no exception, when asked about the Mothers' role and significance. It is the memory of a petition organized by Mothers in 2001 regarding the Center's location. This part of the activism story is treated in the same manner as the previous one: it only exists in collective memory without being transformed into a written or institutionalized one. The acknowledgement of Mothers' role in locating and establishing the Memorial Center is crucial for understanding that part of post-genocide history; otherwise, there is an impression being formed that after 1995, there were no pushbacks, provocations, and attempts to silence Mothers and survivors in many ways. The history of Mothers' fight for the location is an important portrayal of the reality of survivors and returnees in RS and the reality of doing politics in a deeply divided society, where half of the territory has unresolved and contradictory autonomy fueled by the international community and the idea of Greater Serbia. In addition to that, marginalizing Mothers' role in it enables the impression (that I had as a kid) that all one can see in the Potočari complex today is a product of the hard work of big important men in suits. Therefore, gaps and silences addressed are not at all naïve ones, and they do more damage than they seem at first. Incorporating those aspects into the general knowledge of genocide, through informal channels and the Center's memory projects (because it is impossible to do it through formal education), is a necessity.

This chapter sought to present research outcomes that situate the issue of memory in the context of the Mothers' Association and the Memorial Center Srebrenica. In a discussion with the literature, I analyzed the respondents' views on women's memory and the institutionalization of the memory of Mothers' activism into Center's projects. In that sense, this chapter established a compass by which I turn the issue of memory towards the future. It analyzed the silence about Mothers' agency in the Center's narrative that centers victimhood, and critically reflected on this status quo that needs to be challenged. In the following chapter, I discuss the relationship between the two organizations, the possibility of challenging the current setting regarding the memory of women in the future, and the causes of uncertainty of that future.

CHAPTER 4 – THE FUTURE OF WOMEN'S MEMORY AND ITS UNCOMFORTABLE QUESTION: WHAT HAPPENS AFTER THE GENERATION OF MOTHERS IS GONE?

This chapter orients the discussion of memory of women's experiences and roles towards the future. Here, I am going to summarize previously shared insights regarding the relationship between the Mothers' Association and the Memorial Center and analyze the power inequalities and specificities of that relationship. I intend to present my research findings that relate to the future of memory and discuss its prospects together with the contemporary context and its political and social constraints.

Relationship Between the Mothers' Association and the Memorial Center

Given the scope of the research and the distinction between the two groups of interviewees, it comes naturally to discuss the dynamics of power, cooperation, and the broader relationship between the two main actors in collective memory, the Memorial Center of Srebrenica and the Mothers' Association. As with almost every other aspect of this story, the line between personal and institutional is blurred: the majority of the Center's employees are relatives, neighbors, or close friends of the Mothers, all tied together in the everyday life of returnees in Srebrenica. Consequently, such relations, whether on an institutional or collegial level, can never be understood solely through the lens of formal collaboration. Moreover, to analyze and situate the findings of this research and situate the knowledge in a dynamic post-genocidal context like the Bosniak one, it is necessary to portray how those complex, and at the same time personal and formal, connections operate simultaneously as cause and effect in these circles.

The lives of the Mothers and employees are inextricably woven into the mission of both the Memorial Center and the Association, tied together with personal stories (personal losses) and collective memory. Understanding the power relations between these two is, therefore, understanding history. As I previously discussed, the Mothers played a pivotal role in many aspects, especially when it came to the establishment of the Memorial Center. Their response to the 2001 proposal of authorities and the international community to establish a cemetery for victims in Kladanj, through petitions, public pressure, and lobbying, served as a cornerstone for today's institution in Potočari (Pollack, 2003). In addition, the Mothers tirelessly lobbied the OHR to ensure that the "Srebrenica-Potočari" Foundation, which previously owned the memorial in Potočari, was legally and formally secured by the decision on the establishment of the Srebrenica-Potočari Memorial Center, a memorial and cemetery for the victims of the 1995 genocide, adopted in 2007. With this decision, the Memorial Center became an institution managed by the state of Bosnia and Herzegovina, through the Board of Directors of the Memorial Center (Office of the High Representative, 2007). I already discussed that all of the interviewees brought up the petition quite often, highlighting how the very foundation of the Center was built by the Mothers. Almasa said she believes that they are exactly the ones who gave a good foundation for the memorialization of the genocide in Srebrenica, and that they are still doing it even today. These reflections on the Mothers' roles regarding the Center were not only employees' perceptions. The Mothers shared them in general, emphasizing the significance of their actions. To remind, Kada Hotić, the vice president of the Association, said that "it gave birth to the Memorial Center". Her sentence illustrates this relationship very vividly and shows that Kada considers the Association to have a parental role vis-à-vis the Memorial Center, and therefore an automatically higher position in the power hierarchy. But is that really so? In the previous chapter, I discussed my impression that the

employees and management of the Center, when talking about the role and position that the Mothers occupy in the Center and claiming it is huge, are actually alluding to some kind of ceremonial and symbolic role, "deserved" for what has been done in the past, *Mater Doloresa* one, but that the real decision-making power is concentrated among the management. Because they are "sacred", they are always addressed with respect and their opinion is taken into consideration. However, what if the Mothers say "no" to some idea or decision? This question was answered by the deputy director, Amra :

> We from the Memorial Center generally share the same goals and ideas with the Association, where we, in a way, mutually support each other. However, there is a red line, our red line, that we will never do anything that the mothers do not agree with. So, if at some point they decide to say "No, we do not agree with that", that idea will automatically be stopped. So far, that has not been the case, because I repeat, there is no reason for that. Because somehow, we share the same fate, we understand each other perfectly, and we are here to support each other, but in case we have an idea that the mothers will not be happy with, that idea will absolutely not be realized. At least not while the Memorial Center is in its current composition.

This portion of Amra's response is significant in a couple of moments. The first one implies the existence of an unwritten "veto". The 'red line' Amra speaks about reflects, to some extent, the power relations between the Memorial Center and the Mothers' Association, in a way that confirms their involvement and important voice in decision-making processes. However, to what extent is that true? Her statement, although it sounds innocent and unproblematic at first, does not have to be so. Stating that there is a red line they will not cross also implies the possibility that they *could*. This possibility also appears in her sentence, "because there is no reason for that". Again, it provokes another question about what would happen if there were a situation in which the views of Mothers do not align with the Center's management's views. Another meaningful part of the quotation is its last sentence, "at least not while the Memorial Center is in its current composition", which demonstrates again the personal dimension of this relationship. Amra nuances the problem

of uncertainty in nearly everything about Srebrenica today, especially in the hard work of the institution and the Association, which could transform into purely bureaucratic if it loses touch with survivors and local people. Her remark here illustrates the intertwining of emotional, personal, and historical battles the Mothers have fought together with the employees of the Memorial Center. Still, even this excerpt supports my doubt about the naivety of the "red line" rule. Amra's claim that the Mothers' opinions are respected in this composition of the Center's management, in addition to implying a fear of a bureaucratic relationship in the future, also suggests that the current setup is like this because of their goodwill and the personal respect they show for the Mothers. What it does not say, but what sounds like an elaboration of it, is: when someone else comes along, who does not necessarily share the same feelings and respect for the Mothers, that someone can very easily exclude them from the decision-making processes, guided by the legal and bureaucratic foundations of the institution. In that sense, Mothers only have moral power in the Memorial Center decision-making processes, not a structural position.

The perspectives of other respondents appeared in similar ways, glorifying the social status of the Mothers and equating it with the position of an actor, although in reality, this may not be the case. All employees, in one way or another, confirmed the importance of Mothers' voices at the Memorial Center, whether they were personally close to them or not. In the previous chapter, I mentioned that the Association has its office and archive storage in two houses, which implies that the office at the Center is not truly necessary for them. Nevertheless, there is also one in the same place as the offices of employees and management. It is a spacious and well-equipped office facing the cemetery, with a wealth of written materials, pictures, and materials from projects they have implemented together with the Center and other collaborators. Munira gave me the key so that I could conduct interviews without any disturbance and have my own private space to work on them.

The employees' solidarity and care for them were not only visible in the Center. During my stay at the house of the Association, I had a chance to see how employees treat them in everyday life. If they need to buy groceries or visit the doctor, there is always someone from the Center at their disposal to drive them, pick them up, and bring them something they need. Even after working time, if they need something, employees visit them, have coffee with them, and chat a little bit, even those younger ones who are not close to them or are not from Srebrenica. Whoever stopped by during my stay in September last year, the Mothers would introduce me and tell them what I do, and if it was someone from the Center that I already knew, we would all have coffee together on the terrace. How used the Mothers are to assistance from the younger members of the returnee community is shown by the fact that they would also ask me to help them with something around the house. There is an unwritten solidarity and joint care for women growing old but still working hard despite the circumstances.

Therefore, a relationship between the Center and the Association can never be observed through the lens of formal cooperation alone. In many aspects, it is more than that. Both organizations are committed to the same mission and are composed of survivors whose motives are, unfortunately, personal. This is, of course, the current situation. As we saw from Amra's statement, the future of this relationship is uncertain. It depends on the people who will hold positions in the Center, as well as the destiny of the Association in the following years. Some would argue that the Mothers' Association would benefit from restructuring relations more formally and legally. I would, instead, suggest using the unique context of their contemporary relationship to strengthen their interconnectedness and lay the foundation for a self-sustaining association, whose survival will not be threatened by changes of generation. Still, the excerpts I analyzed earlier indicate a certain amount of power inequality between these two organizations. Mothers are respected primarily for

who they are, but the input I received during the research indicates that their voice is enabled by the management voluntarily and out of personal respect for them. This further puts the future of that relationship at risk, because we cannot claim that those who are in the administration of the Memorial Center will always share the same feelings and attitudes towards Mothers.

Unexpected Findings: Mothers' vs. Memorial Employees' Visions of the Future

Contrary to my expectations, the two groups of participants shared attitudes opposite to what I had predicted: employees responded in the manner I had expected of Mothers, and Mothers responded in the manner I had expected of the employees. Such a reversal, nevertheless, nuanced certain conclusions of this thesis.

When it comes to a general vision of the future and questions regarding it, most of the employees answered similarly, the same way most of the Mothers shared similar visions and ideas. Contrary to my expectations, the Mothers showed that they were thinking a lot about the future of the Association after their deaths, while the employees were the ones without a concrete vision on both the future of the Association and the future of memory of women's experiences and roles and those who seemed taken aback by the questions about it. Some of them even seemed to me as if these questions had never occurred to them before the interview with me.

Given that my interviews were conducted primarily with the curator, archive staff, and oral history project staff, I did not initially expect much input regarding the Memorial Center's vision for the future of the Association. Accordingly, I expected more concrete and clear ideas from the deputy director and the director himself. However, what Amra and Emir shared with me was not much different from the responses of previous employees, and most of what was said on this matter did not go beyond the level of brainstorming.

For instance, Azir, Hasan, and Almasa all agreed that the Association should outlive the Mothers, expressing how it should be taken over by descendants or activists with the same mission, proposing similar ideas for the design concept. Hasan proposed that the Association transform into a foundation for scientific research:

> When there are none, then the association should grow into a foundation that will deal with the legacy. In a scholarly sense, that will deal with human rights, women's activism, and women's memory.

Almasa echoed Hasan's idea, adding that it is unlikely for the Association to become an institution, but rather an NGO that would survive on grants. She said:

> It could still be an NGO that would need a female person who would really want to dedicate herself to it. And of course, it could be just an organization, but that's what they would have to become. Projects that would go through, and of course, with projects, you always have some funds that could be enough for you to hire one, two, or any number of people, where some kind of education could be done or something. But for it to be an institution, I simply don't believe that's a realistic expectation. Especially, of course, after they're gone.

Their skepticism towards the idea of an Association becoming an institution, and proposing an NGO as an alternative, indicates the problem of unpaid activism, which I will address separately later. Both Hasan and Almasa showed that they are thinking about the future of the Association and its legacy to some extent, although it is obvious from their answers that these are personal ideas, not informed by the Memorial Center's ideas and plans, if any. Another moment that indicated this was their opinion that figuring out the Association's future is primarily the duty of the Mothers. Almasa said she would like to see the Mothers find someone from the younger generations to include them in the Association soon. Azir expanded this view, arguing that this is more of the Mothers' concern:

> It is important that the work of the association continues, of course. How and in what way will it function when the Mothers, who are currently active, who make a great contribution to the culture of remembrance, are gone, of course, it is up to them to think about how and in what way to include younger women, mothers, or their descendants.

Although Azir was the only one who said clearly that the issue of the future of the Association is a question *for* the founders of the Association, it was also present among other employees' visions, who expressed it more subtly or, simply, by showing it is something they did not think about that much. What surprised me in my conversations with Azir, Almasa, and Hasan was not that they considered it the Mothers' duty to work out on this issue, but that they did not mention the Memorial Center's management in this context. It seemed as if there was no place for the Center's involvement at all. If the Association were not tightly connected with the Center's actions, projects, and mission, this would be an understandable point of view, but, as it is evident from the discussion in the previous section, their strategies and fields of activity are much intertwined.

Since the interviews with the director and deputy director took place at the end of my research period, due to their tight schedules and a couple of postponements, I expected to find out more than I did with the rest of the employees. I assumed the lack of common vision toward the future in their very individual ideas was simply the lack of workers' awareness of long-term strategies developed by management. However, after conducting interviews with Emir and Amra, it became clear that this was not the case. The management itself did not have (or did not want to share) a more concrete vision, making me assume that they have not yet addressed this issue, at least not in a formal, institutional sense. The reason for this could be what I called the ~~post~~-genocide context earlier, in which the Memorial Center not only carries out the mission of preserving memory but also continues to struggle with genocide denial, policies that are derived from separatist nationalist ideology, and the safety of survivors. Emir himself only echoed the idea of a foundation, expressing concerns about the unsustainable activism that I will address below. When asked if a certain legal framework that addresses the Association's future exists, he only mentioned a Memorandum of Cooperation that they signed with all partner organizations. In one part of the answer, he even said

that it wasn't really a question for him, pointing out that he couldn't call the Mothers and ask them about something that will take place after their death (implying that it was in bad taste), but that he would address the issue if they asked him to. This implies that they have never shared their ideas about the future with the management and that there may be a communication problem in this matter. On the other hand, Amra expressed her concerns about how to preserve the Association formally and legally, and pointed out that the Center needs to start thinking about it. She said:

> I think it's long past time to think about how we're going to continue on the path they took. What are the methods we're going to use, and how are we going to preserve these associations? So, here's the formal, legal thing first of all? (…) It's a very, very difficult question, and it will depend a lot on how many people, young people want to deal with this issue.

Although the absence of a formal and institutional vision is clear, Amra's responses showed that at least someone in the management is concerned about this. She continued by saying:

> How much support will they have (young people, possible successors of the Association)? Let's say, if we measure how much support the Mothers have, how much support will those who inherit the association actually inherit? The Memorial Center will certainly work in terms of preserving the memory of the Mothers, and I believe so, but I don't want it to be just an exhibition where people will talk about them in the past tense. We'll try to create living matter there, something that lasts and something that may grow. But it will be difficult.

The deputy director's statement that she does not want to see the narrative of the Mothers only in the past tense in the future is significant in two ways. First, it brings up the issue of the Center memorializing Mothers' activism in the future. I have already talked in the previous chapter about how the exhibits within the museum complex in Potočari do not address it. Azir mentioned that he would include a section on the Mothers as part of a large exhibition for the 30th anniversary this year. However, when I asked Hasan about this, he was the only one who had a contrary opinion to the others, arguing that the Memorial Center should not have any exhibits concerning the Mothers as long as they are alive. "It's a story that hasn't been told yet," he reasoned. I failed to see the reason for waiting here, and what about the Mothers' role in the past could possibly change because

of the future years of their work. It seemed as if he wanted to offer a meaningful excuse, but it was not sufficient for me.

Second, it nevertheless shows that the management (or at least the deputy director alone) is thinking in the direction of the Association's future. What is problematic (and unspoken) here is the lack of time. The shift and departure of a generation are on the horizon, and these questions must be addressed before it is too late. Even Amra herself expressed concern about the urgency of this issue, mentioning some of the Mothers who have already passed away.

When it comes to the Mothers, their ideas were more vivid and offered more details and suggestions. As mentioned earlier, I was surprised when Mothers showed that they were already thinking about it, although I failed to see a concrete strategy there either. Of course, my low expectations of Mothers turned out to be a product of my own prejudices towards them and underestimation of their pace of work. It was inspiring to listen to women envisioning the future of the Association to come after their deaths. They were not disturbed that I was dealing with what was to come after them. They did not circumvent it like the employees who showed a hint of fear and apprehension of those coming times, but approached the issue with such strength and an inexhaustible source of ideas.

When I asked the president of the Association, Munira Subašić, if the Association is going to shut down in the future, she strongly denied it:

> No, the association will never stop working, I can guarantee that myself. Well, the young people already have it, who have been educated, who know the plan, the program, what the goal of the association is, it will continue like that. That's a promise.

She not only confirmed the existing vision for the future, but she also shared a couple of ideas with me regarding the concept. I mentioned one of those, the Museum of Mothers, in the second chapter. Such ideas show us that the Mothers truly think about this and are trying to channel them in a way

that becomes a long-term setting. However, Munira's confirmation didn't truly convince me. She mentioned a certain plan and program, and the young people who were informed about it, however, nothing in the rest of the interview provided more concrete imagined arrangements in the future. Therefore, this, although more concrete than the things said in the Center, still sounded to me like it was not worked out strategically to the end. In addition to that, Kada expressed her concern regarding the motivation of new generations to take over the Association since they do not have direct memories of war and genocide. Still, she supported the idea of a foundation for educational and research purposes, bringing up the problem of unpaid activism and that the Association should become a state-funded institution in a more stable political system:

> I don't think any of the generations that are to come can be relevant. Because they don't have that memory of the events, we are the most relevant eyewitnesses. Real witnesses to everything, that's very important. I don't think anyone can position themselves in this way on this scale. But maybe they can continue to develop memory for the future under that same name. Through studying the past, through literature, through meetings, conferences, and history classes, but to use our content, what we leave behind. We have a lot of archives where a lot of things are written down.

The way Kada's words sound to me is that if there was a plan and young people who were being directed to it, she doesn't know about it, or that she did not want to share it. Her use of the term "maybe" implies that here, too, it is brainstorming and not an elaborated idea, otherwise, she would not have used it in this context. The interview with her was one of the shortest, and I only got the impression from her that I was perceived as a "foreign body". On the contrary, as I wrote about in my methodology section, everyone else expressed their happiness that finally "our children" are writing about these topics, and not "foreigners". Šehida explained the future of the Association in a similar way to Munira, mentioning that there are already some young people who could take over, but again vaguely, and in short lines between the narrative about the Association's past, so I'm not sure to what extent I can claim that they have worked out and established that "future".

Nevertheless, what is important from their interviews is that they showed the Association is thinking in that direction and that they keep proper records, as well as archiving for the sake of future generations. Not one of them was surprised by my questions about the future, the way many employees were. In that sense, they are already doing what Azir said they should. Therefore, is this the time for the "intervention" of the Memorial Center in terms of figuring this out on paper? The "communication problem" I mentioned could also be the issue here, since it seems the Memorial Center director is waiting for the Mothers to bring it up. The legal and other formalities Amra mentioned are not to be downplayed. For this reason, I found it surprising that the Mothers were more forthcoming and that this issue had been elaborated to a greater extent than at the Memorial Center. The prejudice against the Mothers as rural women without higher education played a role in my early opinion too, but what I did not expect was that an institution like the Memorial Center, with a team of people who work daily in the area of preserving memory, and which represents the victims and survivors, has less to say about the future of women's memory than the Mothers themselves. Everyone was so 'certain' that the Association would outlive the Mothers, but most of them were improvising when I asked how.

The Unresolved Past/Reality Check: Where the Murdered are Still Sought, the Future of Memory is Not a Priority

In her interview with me, Amra opened up more about her personal losses in the genocide and what it's like to still search for loved ones:

> Two or three years ago, I said this live on television, I think it was even on July 11: that the genocide in Srebrenica is still going on. And I stand behind those words of mine because we are still looking for our loved ones. I am still searching for 45% of the gradual remains of my late grandfather, my mother's father. We found the first 55% in four different mass graves. On the other hand, we have increasingly pronounced denials of genocide. Denial of genocide is the final stage of genocide by definition. So, if we have denial, then it means it still lasts.

I already elaborated briefly in the first chapter that the post-genocide context of the Bosniaks in Srebrenica is in many ways genocidal, without "post". The very fact that RS exists as a political structure that few political and foreign actors problematize is proof that the genocide exists in its political formation, and its final stages, which is also implied by the scope of the denial I reflected on in the introduction. However, there is one more painful fact that does not allow survivors to put an end to it. Since the nature of the crime consisted of moving bones from primary to secondary and, sometimes even tertiary graves (Huffine, Crews, & Davoren, 2007, 432), and since not all mass graves have yet been located, today more than a thousand victims have not been identified and buried in Potočari, or their skeletons have been partially found. As Amra acknowledged, she found her grandfather's remains in as many as four different mass graves, and yet those remains make up no more than 55% of the total skeleton. Every year, a few days after the anniversary and funeral, the addition of subsequently found and identified remains to the already buried victims begins. This intensifies the pain of survivors who often have to choose between burying their loved ones with only a few remains and then going through the same pain each time new remains are found, or waiting for the skeleton to be completed, which many may never see. Sarah Wagner wrote about the processes of identification, family notification, and burial decisions arguing that they affect family members in various ways, including the reawakening of trauma, going through the same process of mourning each time they find a new remnant (Wagner S. E., 2008).

Considering that this is an ongoing process that may never be completed, this means that the primary goal of the Mothers' Association, as well as the Srebrenica Memorial Center, which is to find, identify, and bury the victims of the Srebrenica genocide, has not yet been achieved, and may never be. The one of the potential explanations why the two organizations don't have the "luxury"

of pursuing far-reaching visions and ideas is precisely the harsh fact that survivors are still waiting for a call from MPI[31] to inform them that their loved ones have been identified.

'Institution' Trouble: Precarity of the Memorial's Future, Fragility of the Mere Existence of the State

The best way to articulate the point of this section is to outline the current crisis in Bosnia happening since March of 2025. In the past few weeks, Serb nationalist leader Milorad Dodik has carried out a series of steps toward the secession of the RS - an entity whose creation was based on ethnic cleansing. He has effectively nullified the Dayton Peace Agreement, and no one from the authorities (not even Bosniak politicians) has reacted except with words and empty statements. The only institutional reaction has come from the Memorial Center in Potočari. Director Emir Suljagić has closed the Center until further notice, sending all employees home as a precaution in the event of a military conflict, stating that he would not risk the safety of genocide survivors and make them anyone's human shields (Elvir Hodžić; Anadolu Ajansi;, 2025). The Center was closed for weeks until OHR interfered and guaranteed additional safety measures for the institution. It did not interfere to sanction Dodik or arrest him.

Only a few citizens are concerned about the situation. Even I have gone completely numb: from my early childhood, I remember a dozen "security crises" where I would come home from school frightened because other kids heard their parents saying there would be a war again. I was raised with the phrase "*Every generation in Bosnia goes through at least one war,*" and as bizarre as it may sound to people who come from developed countries, young people here are always aware of

[31] MPI (Missing Persons Institute) in Tuzla, a branch of IMCP, is in charge of notifying families and corresponding with them.

this possibility. For us, this is normal, a potential lifetime event. Countries where the last war was World War II sound like Disneyland.

We have gone completely numb to the point that we don't care about the fact that the post-war country we know may not exist anymore. Everyone is casually speculating if one man is stronger than the whole state, and approaching such serious issues as another interesting experiment to observe. And if politicians, leaders, and decision-makers do not care about the current undermining of state institutions in Sarajevo, how can anyone expect they care about a museum in the middle of the ethnically cleansed part of the country, a dead end that is not a stopover in either direction and a place where people only go on July 11th to attend a funeral? This 'reality check' only nuances the distorted and frivolous understanding of institutions among Bosniak people who still wander lost on the geopolitical scene.

The 'institution trouble' is, of course, a complex problem that could be the subject of another master's thesis, but it is important to address it briefly, and this is where the insights of the employees can help us illustrate the point again. Those who have been working for a long time in the Center pointed to Emir Suljagić, the current director, as the key driver of positive change and development. Especially those who recall the period before his tenure asserted to me that his appointment marked a turning point for this institution, elevating the Center's work to a more serious and professional level. Hasan made a comparison between those two periods, pointing out how the resources, the scope of projects, and areas of work rapidly expanded with Suljagić's arrival:

> At the institutional level, things started to change, so awareness, in a sense of collective memory, started to change. Institutions, political actors, and those stakeholders, right, they started to understand the importance of memory, remembrance, and collective memory, and some of the responsibilities they have to contribute to it, and that they are more obligated. And somehow, when the director came here 5-6 years ago, then they also started to help and give funds and they saw that we were doing the right thing.

Hasan's observations were echoed by Almasa, too. She said:

> Before, in the Memorial Center, you could come only to pay your respects to the victims, and walk through the Center, which was once, of course, the Dutch Battalion base, and therefore, the complex itself is a museum exhibition, if I may say so. But in the last few years, there has been active work on documenting everything else related to memorialization. We didn't have any publications before, and in the last five years, we have had a lot.

Almasa's statement portrays the contrast between the state of the Center before Suljagić's tenure and today, through the example of visitors. As someone who visited Potočari for the first time as a teenager 10-12 years ago, I have to confirm the striking difference with today's state of the complex, the number of exhibitions, and the content for visitors. The very fact that I participated in the first summer school of genocide studies in Potočari last July would have been unimaginable to the teenager Jasmina, who in the early 2010s came to see the cemeteries and a small room with an exhibition of black and white pictures. That was all there was to see. In that sense, I believe it is not an overstatement to say that Suljagić has elevated the institution to a higher level.

But that is the core of the problem raised in this section: the survival and operation of the institution must not depend on the individual. Suljagić doesn't do his job only for a paycheck. If that was the case, he could just continue with the previous pace, organizing a funeral in July and giving statements regarding political affairs throughout the year. His connection with the place where he grew up and the positionality of a teenager who survived the fall of Srebrenica in the 1990s is what fuels his work, and that is not a bold interpretation or assumption; it is simply something everybody around him sees. Naturally, the question arises of what things will look like when somebody else replaces him? Post-war state institutions in Bosnia are infamous in society as a haven for idlers. We saw from employees' impressions that the same problem was present in the Center before Suljagić. Therefore, it comes naturally to worry if the same destiny awaits the institution again, in

the case of a new director. Is the key to Suljagić's good governance his personal motives? Should someone from Srebrenica be the new director again, and does it have to be a survivor? These are the questions that remain open. Such criteria do not necessarily guarantee success either.

In addition to that, the destiny of the Memorial Center is still uncertain, because the state is uncertain, as Amra and Emir underlined through the interviews. Moreover, the source of power for the Memorial Center comes precisely from Sarajevo, as it is evident from the 2007 OHR decision that the Center is administered by the state of Bosnia and Herzegovina (Office of the High Representative, 2007). However, this disparity between the place of power and the actual geographical location of the Memorial Center (in the "enemy" territory) also causes instability, as can be concluded from Suljagić's move to close the Memorial Center in March. In such a self-devouring political context, no one can blame the management for not having an elaborate strategy on how to reform the Mothers' Association in the future. One can only hope they think in that direction.

(Un)paid Activism as One of the Central Issues

This section discusses the problem of unsustainable and unpaid activism as a cause of the non-inclusion of younger members in the daily work of the Mothers' Association and their preparation for taking over the Association in the future. What I refer to as unpaid activism is an unsustainable type of activism that does not enjoy financial security and often struggles to "survive" on grants and donations, and whose future of action is uncertain because of it. Given that many participants from both groups raised this issue, it suggests that employees, as well as the Mothers themselves, are aware of this "concrete" problem that arises from the material instability of such organizations. As Šehida pointed out, young people need to have a source of income to deal with the legacy of the Association, which is not possible in its current form. Mothers generally have their own

pensions, or are cared for by surviving family members, and do not have “small children and a husband” who would prevent them from dedicating themselves fully to the Association, as Šehida said. Therefore, everyone is aware that taking over the Association and transforming it into a foundation in the future would require establishing financial stability for its members. How big are the prospects for such a thing in the future?

When it comes to financial stability, few NGOs in BiH enjoy such a “luxury”. Even the Memorial Center itself, which is in a way a state institution, faces the problem of insufficient funds from the state, which cover the salaries of a small number of employees and basic maintenance costs. Many of the Center's projects are sponsored by foreign countries, their embassies in Bosnia and Herzegovina, or foreign organizations. Employees also shared the problem of insufficient funds to create new job positions that are needed. The Mothers do not have regular funding at all and are registered as an Association, which is a non-profit organization by law. What are the chances of the Association being financially secure after the takeover by the new generations is a question that is very difficult to answer. As we have seen, even the state and peace are uncertain. Provided that the political framework survives until then, and that the new generations decide to transform the Association into a foundation, this would mean that they would have to look for donors. Just as other Memorial Center projects are funded by foreign states and non-governmental actors, the foundation's potential work could also seek support from the same donors, who would aim to support the memory establishment. For instance, the Netherlands is one of the most active countries in terms of financial assistance (for obvious reasons) and is one of the countries that could be lobbied for financial support.

At the end of the day, all this requires the will and energy of future generations who would take up the mission of the Mothers to tackle activism that often does not promise comfort. When it comes

to Kada's wishes for the Association to become an institution in a similar way to the Memorial Center, I consider such wishes to be utopian. Unfortunately, at this point in 2025, we are far from a less complex, more just, and stable system. Therefore, I share Almasa's opinion that the Association, if it outlives Mothers, is going to have to "survive on grants". The bigger problem is the question with which I intend to conclude the chapter in the next section: Do we have young individuals who are ready for this?

Heirs of the Narrative: Who Will Continue? Do Such Women Exist among Us?

When asked about the future of the Association and whether it should be descendants or someone else, Suljagić said: "I can imagine a group of about ten young, educated women from Sarajevo, Tuzla, eastern Bosnia, doing this. But whether those ten women exist in reality, I really don't know." This goes back to the question of who should take the helm, are there those "young people" that Munira assured me existed and were privy to the plans, and who are these new generations? Who are the women that Suljagić imagines establishing the foundation and extending the mission of the Mothers? Are they the granddaughters of the Mothers, or are there very few of them and have no intention of sacrificing comfort and stability for unpaid activism? Am I one of those women? Do I criticize too much, as if I were not part of that generation that bears responsibility for the future of women's memory?

These are all questions that came flooding in after Suljagić's remark. Today, we do not know much about the descendants of genocide survivors. Where are they, are they mostly abroad or in Bosnia (and in which entity), and what is their connection to Srebrenica? Munira herself mentioned that she has grandchildren in Sarajevo. Is there anyone among them with the motivation and energy needed to take over the Association? In the end, what Kada and Amra brought up during the interview, about what will motivate these new generations and whether they will have the reach in

society that the Mothers have, are relevant concerns. Even if such motivation exists in a certain group of young people, as Šehida herself pointed out, they cannot be expected to fully dedicate themselves to something that will not ensure their existence and pay their bills. On the other hand, as Almasa pointed out, many NGOs survive on grants and donors. If a base for initial funding from foreign actors were formed, the idea of transforming the Association into an NGO would not be so unrealistic. However, even this requires planning, lobbying, and conception. This brings us back to the beginning of the circle: someone has to sit down and address the issue of the Association's future. Who?

CONCLUSION – WHEN THE ONLY CERTAINTY IS THAT EVERYTHING IS UNCERTAIN

Approaching the conclusion of my thesis, it is very difficult, if not impossible, to wrap up this discussion without situating it in a larger current context. As I tried to present in the previous chapter, the lack of a long-term vision and desire to deal with such matters only reflects the general uncertainty that is the main characteristic of every aspect of this society: from security to politics and economics. In the second chapter, I briefly touched upon the contemporary collective state of Bosniak people, discussing society's perceptions and narratives about genocide and the nineties. To some extent, the Memorial Center serves as an indicator of a bigger picture. Positioning it like that, it makes us understand why the long-term strategies for the future of memory, including one about the Mothers' Association, do not exist. Or to go further: Why are they nearly impossible in practice?

In the previous chapter, I illustrated the political crisis Bosnia is currently going through in the spring of 2025. I highlighted the state of numbness that the people, including myself, are in, while Bosniak representatives in power deal with trivialities. The biggest issue is that the "temporary" Dayton peace agreement has been perpetuating dysfunctionality, instability, and so many political functions for 30 years that the budget of a state of 3 million citizens cannot support them. Everyone is aware that any political struggle is a fight with windmills as long as Dayton is in force. However, if citizens were to gather to demand the annulment of Dayton, such an act would instantly be interpreted as a cause for a new armed conflict. Dayton is a compromise that suits no one (except the politicians who have made an industry out of it), but at the same time, no one dares to work on its reformation because all three people imagine that reformation differently. In such a political

climate, where at this stage I no longer even know who the state is, what the state is, who is my representative, and whether this status quo in which I was born and raised will ever end, it is utopian to expect an institution like the Memorial Center to function healthily with long-term visions and plans. Such a thing would be an exception and an example to be marveled at.

Therefore, the condition of this institution is only a micro-reflection of the general condition of the state apparatus, the people, and the country. Moreover, seen in this way, the Srebrenica Memorial Center is perhaps a positive example in comparison to other institutions.

However, withholding criticism and not trying to work on small things while living in the political status quo sounds like an excuse. As I presented in the previous chapter, the Mothers seem more willing to think about a future that does not include them than the employees. Some justified their lack of vision by saying that this was the Mothers' task, while Director Suljagić himself made it clear that this was something they should start, and that the Memorial Center would then join in the process. However, the legal framework that would solve this uncertainty does not exist. The Mothers stated that they had several young people whom they were trying to involve in their daily work and prepare for the takeover. The work of the Association and the Memorial Center is primarily based on preserving the memory of the victims, so I was very happy to see that, in addition, both organizations see the importance of preserving the memory of Mothers as well. The Center's employees also expressed their willingness to frame the story of the Mothers in museum settings in the future, although all of them so far have been temporary or traveling in nature.

When it comes to the discussion of gender and the essentialization of Mothers, the employees have shown in many instances that they have no problem with the incorporation of feminist methods and gender as a possible perspective, but that foreign terms like “feminism” and “gender” are a kind of trigger that associates with epistemic violence. This is again just a reflection of the state of

society, and it will take some time for this picture to crystallize, but I have faith in the younger generations. However, the essentialization of the image of the Mothers in society must be challenged, especially because a more nuanced one would help understand agency and victimhood in a way that is not so mutually exclusive, but healthier and more encouraging.

Suggestions for Future Research

When it comes to possibilities for further research, there are many. Although the topic of Mothers as activists against political violence has been quite elaborated, as has the topic of memorialization at the Memorial Center, there is very little research oriented toward the future and that deals with the issue of women's memory and the culture of remembrance of the role of Mothers. Several areas would be more than useful to explore and encompass.

The first is in the area of women's memory. My thesis focused primarily on Mothers and their role, but I pointed out that women's experiences of surviving genocide were mostly identified only with those of maternal experience. The digital archive of the Memorial Center also contains interviews with younger women who were doctors during the siege, or teenagers and girls, and therefore has enormous potential for work on the topic of the diversity of women's experiences. In addition to that, working on these topics would also nuance maternal experiences, which are also often associated only with helplessness and passivity.

This introduces us to another area of research that could be expanded, and which I addressed in my third chapter, in the section Silences and Gaps. The first is the women’s ctivism during the siege of Srebrenica and the activities of Aktiv Žena, which some Mothers refer to as the beginning of their story. Second, there is not enough literature that explores women’s protests in Tuzla in the aftermath of the genocide. Especially when it comes to the culture of remembrance, the newer generations know almost nothing about it. The third is the petition about the location of the

cemetery and the Memorial Center. Pollack and Wagner wrote about this in their works, but in the context of the topic of burial processes and the landscape of memory. Apart from academia, there are no books, movies or media representations in Bosnian that treat it.

Finally, the discussion about the essentialization of Mothers in Bosniak society can always be expanded. There have been substantial works on the topics of essentialization, agency, and victimhood, but this can always be expanded within the culture of memory and understandings of feminism in the Bosnian post-Dayton context.

I tried to crystallize through my thesis both the disappointment and the hope that I simultaneously gained during my research period regarding whether and how Mothers and employees think about the future. The mixture of these two impressions remains in force at the end. Although I expected more in certain areas, I believe it was useful to determine the current state of this issue and perhaps encourage the respondents to think further. However, what is important is that everyone unanimously confirmed that women's memory is important. It remains to be seen how much this conviction will be transformed in practice and who and in what ways will take over the establishment of the narrative in the future.

Appendix A: Interview Questions for the Memorial Center Employees

Introductory Questions:
Can you describe your role as an employee at the Srebrenica-Potočari Memorial Center? What are your responsibilities?
Your professional experience is mostly tied to memory preservation projects. How do you view the process of establishing and maintaining memory? To what extent do you consider it important, and why?

In-Depth Questions:
How do you perceive the issue of women's memory of the genocide? Is it important and relevant to memory preservation? Could you explain why or why not?
Can you describe some of the projects you are working on or have worked on that include women's experiences and memories?
Do you think it is important to preserve the long-term memory of the activism and struggle of the Mothers of Srebrenica, or is it only important to maintain the memory of the victims?
In your oral history and memory preservation projects, the women's perspective is present through the experiences of the Mothers of Srebrenica. Are there different women's experiences, and are you working on highlighting them?
Are you familiar with feminist methods of interviewing, archiving, and memory preservation? Do you think the Memorial Center will adopt such methods in future memory-related projects?

Concluding Questions:
How do you see the future of women's memory of the Srebrenica genocide? Does the Memorial Center have plans for long-term projects related to it?
From your perspective, is it important for new generations to continue the mission of the Mothers of Srebrenica and become involved in the Association, or does the Association have no future?
What would you personally like to see in the future? What kind of narrative would you prefer once the generations of Mothers pass away — remembrance of their activism or only of the victims?

Appendix B: Interview Questions for the Mothers

Introductory questions:
Please describe your experience and involvement in the association "Mothers of the Enclaves of Srebrenica and Žepa." What is your role?
To what extent do you believe the preservation of memory about the genocide is important? How do the Mothers of Srebrenica keep the memory alive?

In-depth questions:
How do you view the issue of women's memory of the genocide? Do you consider it important and relevant for the preservation of memory? Could you explain why or why not?
Do you think it is important to preserve the long-term memory of both the activism and the struggle of the Mothers of Srebrenica? If so, how? Or is it only important to maintain the memory of the victims?
Describe your relationship and cooperation with the Memorial Center.
How do you see the future of the Association? Do you think new generations of women in Srebrenica will continue your mission, or will the Memorial Center take over the role of representing women?
Do you plan to involve new generations in the Association, or does the Association, as such, have no future?

Closing questions:
What kind of narrative would you like to see in the future? Is there consensus among the mothers, or do different perspectives exist?

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