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“War for memory” in Bosnia and Herzegovina on the Example of the City of Goražde

Abstract: The paper examines the “war for memory” in Goražde, the easternmost town of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, which is surrounded by the Republic of Srpska. In May 1992, Muslim-dominated Goražde was encircled by Serb forces, who began a siege of the city that lasted 1,336 days. Serbs, however, emphasize that before the siege began, they felt stigmatized by their Muslim neighbors, who often forced them to leave their homes. Since the end of the war, both Bosnians and Serbs have sought to wage their own wars for memory by erecting increasing numbers of memorial sites.

Keywords: Goražde, Bosnia and Herzegovina, site of memory, collective memory

The formulation of this article’s topic was inspired by Dejan Jović’s book *Rat i mit. Politika identiteta u suvremenoj Hrvatskoj* (War and Myth: The Politics of Identity in Contemporary Croatia), a fascinating study of Croatian domestic politics that considers the legacy of the former Yugoslavia. One of Jović’s most important conclusions is that for part of Croatian society, especially veteran communities, the war did not end in 1995 but continues in a new form – as the “war for the memory of the war”, for its “proper”, “only right” interpretation.¹

While in Croatia the ‘war for memory’ refers to internal discourse and socio-political divisions between right-wing war veterans and liberal, pro-European, democratic, future-oriented groups, in Bosnia and Herzegovina it involves inter-ethnic discourse, identity competition, and extremely opposing interpretations of the events of 1992–1995. Bosnia and Herzegovina is cited as a model example of mnemonic dissonance (the occurrence of memory conflicts), which should be understood as the coexistence of three different imaginaries – Serbian, Croatian, and Bosniak – practically devoid of common ground.² It should not be surprising

¹ Dejan Jović, *Rat i mit. Politika identiteta u suvremenoj Hrvatskoj* (Zaprešić: Fraktura, 2017), 28–31.

² Jessie Barton Hronešova and Jasmin Hasić, “The 2021 Memory Law in Bosnia and Herzegovina—Reconciliation or Polarization?”, *Journal of Genocide Research*, 26, 4, (2023), 8–10. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14623528.2023.2205687>.

that each side wants to emphasize its own version of the past as loudly as possible while trying to drown out the versions of its neighbors. A common view is that threatened identities, such as those in BiH, feel a greater need to assert their narrative and symbolism, while simultaneously confining themselves to their own representations, which increases ethnic distance. Tomasz Rawski, writing about the formation of a national community by Bosniaks, describes a consolidation-antagonizing strategy (as opposed to a cooperative strategy), based on strengthening the identity of one's own group while opposing it to three antagonists: Serbs, Croats, and the international community.³ It is notable that in recent years, the consolidation and antagonization strategy has dominated among all three Bosnian ethnic groups, which is reflected in their memory politics.

Since 1995, each side has made extensive efforts to commemorate its victims while promoting its own vision of history, both recent and older. This is done through museums and research institutes, where "scientists" are expected to discover the national version of the truth and find evidence that contradicts their own sins,⁴ as well as through numerous monuments and plaques that permeate Bosnian public spaces. The author of this text deliberately uses the word permeated, not saturated, because, according to the author, the tendency to externalize memory has taken on such a grotesque form that it can be seen as kitsch rather than as professional memorial sites. Uroš Čvoro is correct in noting that monuments, which are spontaneously funded by victims' families, veterans' organizations, or local and religious communities, are scattered throughout cities, squares, and roads without any consultation with specialists in space management.⁵ The number of memorial sites may be surprising given the dire financial situation of Bosnia and Herzegovina. In a country where many people cannot afford to meet their basic needs, where infrastructure is very outdated, and where hospitals are underfunded, no expense is spared in honoring heroes and victims. This apparent contradiction is explained by Mile Lasić, who emphasizes that the revisionist approach to the past is combined with the belief that every "our" victim, every "our" victimized person, needs to be commemorated.⁶

At the beginning of 2020, several comments were made about the amount of money spent on commemorating the last war and its victims. This discussion was prompted by a text published by the Bosnian branch of BIRN (Balkan Investigative Reporting Network), a non-governmental organization specializing in investigative journalism and tracking scandals and irregularities in Southeastern Europe. The article reported that, over the past four years, more than 4 million marks (or over 2 million euros) had been spent in Bosnia on constructing

³ Tomasz Rawski, *Boszniacki nacjonalizm. Strategie budowania narodu po 1995 roku* (Warszawa: Scholar, 2019), 8.

⁴ Ibid, 10; "Are Croat nationalists pushing a political agenda on Wikipedia?", *Al Jazeera*, August 5, 2021, <https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2021/8/5/organised-disinformation-campaign-behind-croatian-wikipedia> (accessed: 27. 12. 2023).

⁵ Uroš Čvoro, *Post-Conflict Monuments in Bosnia and Herzegovina: Unfinished Histories* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2020), 55.

⁶ Mile Lasić, *Demokracije i neuspjehe tranzicije u post-jugoslavenskim zemljama* (Beograd–Zagreb: Factum–Jesenski i Turk, 2019), 154.

memorial sites dedicated to the victims of the dominant nation in a given area and directed against neighboring groups. This does not contribute to reconciliation or encourage people to return to places abandoned during the war.⁷ Kalinovik, located in Republika Srpska, may serve as a telling example – the hometown of Ratko Mladić, who was sentenced to life imprisonment for war crimes – at the entrance to which a mural with his likeness and the inscription “City of Heroes” was painted.⁸ At the same time, in the center of the city, there is a monument dedicated to the memory of 359 Serbian fighters. The unveiling was attended by Mladić – Darko.⁹

The “war for memory” is closely linked to the symbolic marking of space, indicating which narrative prevails in a given area. Such markings become more prominent in border regions – areas located at the boundaries of entities or in ethnically mixed zones – where the need to assert one’s own version of “truth” intensifies. Maciej Falski analyzed this paradox of identity rivalry using the example of the town of Stolac.¹⁰ Therefore, it is notable that the creators of collective space focus on quantity rather than quality. Instead of establishing a few spectacular, impressive memorial sites, they prefer to multiply them, leading to the kitschification of space by filling it with relatively cheap but poorly considered objects. Additionally, many new memorial sites overlap with those erected during communist Yugoslavia. It is worth recalling that Bosnia and Herzegovina was the site of extremely heavy battles fought by partisans led by Josip Broz Tito, and numerous monuments, plaques, and museums were established to perpetuate the myth of the partisans’ sacrifice, which formed the foundation of the Socialist Yugoslavia. Traveling through Bosnia today, one often encounters coexisting plaques commemorating the heroes and victims of the National Liberation Struggle (Narodnooslobodilačka borba – NOB) and the most recent war, and it is difficult not to feel that the beauty of Bosnian nature is diminished by the unreflective trend of erecting ever more new memorial sites.

This text attempts to examine the phenomenon of the “war for memory” in the town of Goražde, located in the easternmost part of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina and surrounded on three sides by Republika Srpska, whose borders begin at the outskirts of the city – the eastern part of the suburbs (Novo Goražde) belongs to RS. In this context, the need for a “war for memory” is particularly pronounced. On one hand, Bosniak Goražde strives to assert its symbolism and narrative to the surrounding Serb population; on the other, it seeks to ensure that the memory of the tragic events at the end of the 20th century

⁷ Lamija Grebo and Džana Brkanić, „Četiri miliona maraka za spomenike u službi podjele“, *Detektor.ba*, January 3, 2020, <https://detektor.ba/2020/01/03/analiza-cetiri-miliona-maraka-za-spomenuke-u-sluzbi-podjele/> (accessed: 27. 12. 2023).

⁸ „Kome trebaju spomenici koji nas razdvajaju?“, *Radio Sarajevo*, January 6, 2020, <https://radio-sarajevo.ba/metromahala/teme/kome-trebaju-spomenuci-koji-nas-razdvajaju/363146> (accessed: 28. 12. 2023).

⁹ „Kalinovik: Spomenik za 359 srpskih boraca“, *RTRS vijesti*, July 20, 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?vppdeskstop&vPJF90UxgbkQ> (accessed: 29. 12. 2023).

¹⁰ Maciej Falski, *Niechciana kultura. Odbudowa i instrumentalizacja dziedzictwa kulturowego w Bośni i Hercegowinie* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego, 2022), 43–81.

endures not only among the elderly but, above all, in future generations. As Tomasz Rawski notes, the essence of memory politics is the imposition of a common interpretive framework on individual memories, within which they are to be publicly expressed.¹¹

This is even more important because Serbian neighbors not only have their own version of events, but, moreover, the denial of war crimes has become the founding myth of the RS.¹²

The materials for the article were collected during several field studies in Bosnia and Herzegovina and in Goražde itself (2014, 2023), during which the author conducted numerous interviews and observations. Based on qualitative data, the author also used discourse analysis and content analysis.

Goražde 1992–1995

In May 1992, Muslim-dominated Goražde (69.98% according to the 1991 census) was surrounded by Serb forces, who began a siege of the city that lasted 1,336 days. This was facilitated by the Serbs' earlier control of surrounding areas such as Foča and Višegrad. They aimed to incorporate the entire region of the so-called Podrinje within the borders of Republika Srpska.¹³ The scale of the tragedy for the inhabitants of a small town (16,000 according to the 1991 census) is reflected in the number of victims – over 4,000.¹⁴ It should be noted that in this only bridgehead in the area defended by Muslims, civilians displaced by Serbs found shelter, which caused the population of Goražde to double. In 1993, the UN recognized the city (like Srebrenica, Sarajevo, Bihać, Tuzla, and Žepa) as a safe area protected by British troops.

Paradoxically, after the area was designated as a safe zone, crimes committed by Serbs increased,¹⁵ food drops were very insufficient, and humanitarian aid convoys primarily reached Sarajevo. The only “road of life” was a dangerous trail through Mount Grebak, where the Bosniaks maintained a post and received supplies from nearby Trnovo. When the Serbs took control of Trnovo in 1993, this connection was cut off.

Serbs have a completely different version of these events. They emphasize that even before the outbreak of open conflict, the Muslim majority stigmatized them, called them Chetniks, and that barricades appeared in the streets. The atmosphere became increasingly tense, resulting in the exodus of the Serb popu-

¹¹ T. Rawski, *op. cit.*, 38.

¹² Jessie Barton Hronešova, “Ethnopolitist denial and crime relativisation in Bosnian Republika Srpska”, *East European Politics* 38, 1, (2021), 21–42. <https://doi.org/10.1080/21599165.2021.1871896>.

¹³ Muamer Džananović, „Opsada Goražda 1992-1995“. *Znakovi vremena - Časopis za filozofiju, religiju, znanost i društvenu praksu*, 65-66, (2014), 292–293.

¹⁴ „Prije 23 godine počela je opsada Goražda – grada heroja“, *Klix* May 4, 2015, <https://www.klix.ba/vijesti/bih/prije-23-godine-pocela-je-opsada-gorazda-grada-heroja/150504097> (accessed: 30. 12. 2023).

¹⁵ Nikoleta Milasevic Dobraca, “Bosnia’s Forgotten Victims: The Lost Children of Gorazde”, *Balkan Transitional Justice*, April 2, 2020, <https://balkaninsight.com/2020/04/02/bosnias-forgotten-victims-the-lost-children-of-gorazde/> (accessed: 29. 12. 2023).

lation. Those who chose to remain in the city were often victims of their neighbors¹⁶ or were used as human shields. In this context, the statement of British UNPROFOR commander Michael Rose becomes important: he claimed that most of the houses in Goražde were destroyed, but only some of them by the Serb invaders.¹⁷

Under the Dayton Peace Agreement, Goražde was divided between the entities, but the RS received a small section of the suburbs on both sides of the river. It is not surprising that today, in Bosniak perceptions, the city is seen as “their” city, especially since it is the only center on the Drina River remaining within the borders of the Federation. Bosniaks consider themselves the sole victims of the conflict and regard convictions for crimes committed during the war as groundless, particularly if issued by a court in East Sarajevo.¹⁸ So far, no Serb has been convicted for the tragedy involving civilians, including children, in Goražde.¹⁹

Goražde after 1995

As a result of the war, the city’s ethnic landscape changed – Serbs made up 26% of the population in 1991, but today they account for just over 3%. Goražde became the capital of the Bosnian–Podrinje canton, the easternmost center of Bosniak identity. Military operations were replaced by a “war for memory”. The increasingly frequent threats of secession by the RS make the people of Goražde fear a repeat of the situation at the end of the 20th century, further strengthening the need to symbolically mark the space.

It is worth emphasizing the relatively strong economic situation of Goražde compared to the economic collapse in eastern Bosnia. The metal and arms industries have developed in the city,²⁰ there is a university, unemployment is lower than in the surrounding area, and a shopping mall opened in 2015 attracts neighbors from RS who shop there.²¹ This has further fueled the externalization of Bo-

¹⁶ Alen Bajramović, „Ratni zločini u Goraždu: Hapšenja pripadnika ARBiH korak ka istini“, *Slobodna Evropa*, January 27, 2013, <https://www.slobodnaevropa.org/a/ratni-zlocini-u-gorazdu/24883866.html> (accessed: 31. 12. 2023); Slobodan Milosevic. org, <http://www.slobodanmilosevic.org/documents/reports/Serbian/5-IZ-A2.htm> (accessed: 2. 1. 2024); „Zločini u Goraždu: Dvojica na slobodi, jedan osuđen na dvije godine“, *Mondo*, October 25, 2019, <https://mondo.ba/Info/Drustvo/a908854/Zlocin-nad-Srbima-u-Gorazdu.html> (accessed: 2. 1. 2024).

¹⁷ Bob Nikolic, “General Sir Michael Rose – Goražde”, April 4, 2008, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?vXsXj2okGJvo> (accessed: 30. 12. 2023).

¹⁸ A. Bajramović, „Ratni zločini u Goraždu: Hapšenja pripadnika ARBiH korak ka istini“.

¹⁹ „Za zločine VRS-a počinjene u Goraždu još niko nije osuđen: Nekažnjeno ubijanje herojskog grada“, *Index*, September 4, 2022, <https://index.ba/za-zlocine-vrs-a-pocinjene-u-gorazdu-jos-niko-nije-osudjen-nekaznjeno-ubijanje-herojskog-grada/> (accessed: 3. 1. 2024).

²⁰ „Top 10 u Goraždu: Ovo su lideri po prihodima, dobiti i broju radnika“, *Biznis info*, August 23, 2018, <https://www.biznisinfo.ba/top-10-u-gorazdu-ovo-su-lideri-po-prihodima-dobiti-i-broju-radnika/> (accessed: 3. 1. 2024).

²¹ „Goražde dobilo najveći tržišni centar u regiji i 110 novih radnih mjesta“, *Dnevni avaz*, March 27, 2015, <https://avaz.ba/vijesti/bih/170746/gorazde-dobilo-najveci-trzni-centar-u-regiji-i-110-novih-radnih-mjesta> (accessed: 5. 1. 2024).

sniak rhetoric. When shopping, Serbs – whether they want to or not – must pass a series of memorial sites directed against them.

Memorial sites in Goražde

As noted at the beginning of the text, excessive placement of monuments, symbols, plaques, and similar items has become characteristic of post-Dayton Bosnia and Herzegovina. In a place as unique as Goražde, the need to express one's identity is even stronger. The town of 11,000 residents is filled with memorial statues. Life appears to continue as usual – somewhat more prosperous than in most Bosnian provinces – but at every turn, passersby encounter reminders of events from the late 20th century.

Just after the war, the first plaques commemorating the victims were placed in the city as it was being rebuilt. In 1999, a monument was erected near the seat of the cantonal authorities, “Goražde grad heroj svojim braniteljima” (Goražde city hero to its defenders), where commemorative ceremonies were held and flowers were laid on anniversaries and national holidays. Over time, there were calls for the monument to be redesigned in a more spectacular form. Work on the new memorial site began in 2019, but it was officially opened only in April 2022, on the thirtieth anniversary of the beginning of the siege.²² The monumental project features a wall displaying the names of fallen defenders from Goražde and the surrounding area, along with a large lily, the symbol of the Bosniaks. According to official data, the project costs 240,000 KM.²³

Also, in the city center, there is another monument commemorating the youngest victims of the war (Spomenik poginulim djeci). The monument reflects the current trend of highlighting the problems and traumas experienced by children during armed conflicts.²⁴ It is a wall inscribed with the names and surnames of the victims. The monument was unveiled in 2013 and renovated in 2020, when greenery was planted around it.²⁵ As a result, it has become a place where children spend their free time and play, especially since there is a cafe nearby. There are often claims that not all the names of the dead were mentioned, and that at least 121 were killed and 430 injured during the siege.²⁶ Therefore, local organizations and families of the victims are demanding another reconstruction of the monu-

²² „Goražde: Otvoreno centralno spomen-obilježje poginulim braniocima“, *Anadolu Agency*, May 4, 2022, <https://www.aa.com.tr/ba/balkan/gora%C5%BEde-otvoreno-centralno-spomen-obilje%C5%BEje-poginulim-braniocima/2579356> (accessed: 6. 1. 2024).

²³ „Otvoreno centralno spomen-obilježje ‘Goražde grad heroj, svojim braniocima’“, *Raport*, May 4, 2022, https://raport.ba/otvoreno-centralno-spomen-obiljezje-gorazde-grad-heroj-svojim-braniocima/#google_vignette (accessed: 5. 1. 2024).

²⁴ A similar monument was unveiled in 2009 in Sarajevo, and since 2017 the War Childhood Museum has been operating there.

²⁵ „Završeni radovi na uređenju spomen obilježja ubijenoj i nastradaloj deci 1992. – 1995. godina“, *Grad Goražde*, July 24, 2020, <https://gorazde.ba/završeni-radovi-na-uredjenju-spomen-obiljezja-ubijenoj-i-nastradaloj-djeci-1992-1995-godina/> (accessed: 7. 1. 2024).

²⁶ Muamer Džananović, „Zločini nad djecom u Goraždu tokom opsade 1992-1995“, *Monumenta Srebrenica*, 5, (2016), 214.

ment.²⁷ This shows that Bosnian memory architecture is often built hastily, without thorough consideration or public consultation.

Right next to the mentioned monument is the Alija Izetbegović Bridge, which connects two parts of the city and was under fire during the siege, especially during the Serbian offensive in 1994. At that time, the only “bridge under the bridge” in the Balkans was built beneath it to allow residents to cross the Drina safely.²⁸ Today, it is one of the main attractions in Goražde, frequently photographed by journalists and reporters. However, it has not been renovated, and the makeshift wartime structure is deteriorating. There was a proposal to reconstruct the Alija Izetbegović Bridge – the old bridge from Ottoman times – and a Turkish investor was even prepared to provide funding for this project. It was argued that such an investment would attract tourists, as seen in Višegrad and Konjic.²⁹ However, the inhabitants of Goražde were clearly opposed to the project from the beginning, as the reconstruction would involve demolishing the “bridge under the bridge”, which is particularly important to them.³⁰

One cannot cross the “bridge under the bridge” – from the north side, the entrance is blocked by a restaurant, but you can view it from the south, where a plaque commemorates its construction. Around the plaque, in the immediate vicinity of the monument dedicated to children, there is an open-air exhibition focused on the hardships of life in the besieged city and the ways in which the inhabitants tried to cope with the reality of war. The exhibition was created in cooperation with the cantonal Ministry of Veterans Affairs (Ministarstvo za boračka pitanja), the local cultural center, and the local museum (Zavičajni muzej Goražde). The museum itself is located next door and tells a moving story about the tragedy of the siege, from the Bosniak perspective.

In 2013, a plaque was placed on the Alija Izetbegović Bridge, referring to the events that occurred there in December 1941 and January 1942, when “the Chetnik fascist units of Draža Mihailović organized the massacre of Muslims – citizens of this country”.³¹ The message is clear: Serbs also killed their Muslim neighbors in the past, so while one can speak of eternal enemies and eternal victims, the logic of this narrative contradicts the idea of reconciliation. Further-

²⁷ Tom Barlow Brown, “Stories from Gorazde: How One Bosnian Town Survived a Siege”, *Balkan Transitional Justice*, January 28, 2022, <https://balkaninsight.com/2022/01/28/stories-from-gorazde-how-one-bosnian-town-survived-a-siege/> (accessed: 6. 1. 2024).

²⁸ „Goraždanski ‘most ispod mosta’ u ratu je spasio hiljade života“, *Radio Sarajevo*, February 3, 2018, <https://radiosarajevo.ba/vijesti/bosna-i-hercegovina/gorazdanski-most-ispod-mosta-u-ratu-je-spasio-hiljade-zivota/289912> (accessed: 6. 1. 2024).

²⁹ „Širi se kompleks Memorijalne šume 8.372 kod Goražda“, *Faktor*, July 3, 2019, <https://faktor.ba/vijest/siri-se-kompleks-memorijalne-sume-8372-kod-gorazda/42571> (accessed: 4. 1. 2024).

³⁰ “Građani Goražda protiv rušenja mosta Alije Izetbegovića“, *Goražde Press*, July 29, 2019, <https://gorazde-blogspot.com/2019/07/graani-girazda-protiv-rusenja-mosta.html> (accessed: 7. 1. 2024).

³¹ A part of the inscription on the board. Here is its full/original version: „U decembru 1941. i januaru 1942. godine pripadnici četničkih fašističkih jedinica Draže Mihajlovića na ovom mostu izvršili su pokolj muslimana – građana ovog kraja. Gnusni četnički zločin prekinule su Titove partizanske jedinice oslobađanjem Goražda 26. januara 1942. godine“.

more, it implies the possibility of continued animosity and even escalation of violence. Additionally, Serbs (četniks) are labeled as fascists here, which is highly offensive to them, given the repression in the Independent State of Croatia (Nezavisna Država Hrvatska – NDH), symbolized by the Jasenovac concentration camp. Such a narrative provokes and reinforces ethnic distance by fueling negative emotions.

Next to the headquarters of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Bosnian-Podrinje Canton, there is a plaque, unveiled in 2016, bearing the names of 62 local Bosnian policemen who died between 1992 and 1995. This memorial is often a site for commemorations by various groups, not only those from the uniformed services; flowers and wreaths are placed there on national holidays and local anniversaries related to the siege.³²

In 2023, a 10-meter-high monument in the shape of a lily, the symbol of the Bosniaks, was unveiled on a hill overlooking Goražde. During the day, it is visible from every point in the city, but after dark, thanks to the lighting, it becomes even more noticeable. The project was initiated by Džebail Bajramović, a member of the cantonal parliament, who openly shares his intentions. In his view, eastern Bosnia lacks real [non-Serbian – M.R.] monuments, and the monument is also meant to send a clear message to supporters of secession [i.e. Serbs and RS – M.R.] that Bosniaks will defend their homeland.³³ In another interview, he added that he dedicated it to the city – its defenders, victims, today's residents, and future generations – so that awareness of what happened there remains.³⁴ Therefore, Dž. Bajramović directly referred to the phenomenon that the author of this text, following D. Jovic, calls the “war for memory”. His efforts are aimed at forcing the surrounding Serbs to confront the Bosniak narrative and at preserving mental divisions between current and future generations. Moreover, Bajramović announces the further expansion of the monument so that it will help Goraždans express their Bosniak identity even more.³⁵

In the Lozje district on the outskirts of Goražde, there is a monument dedicated to 40 civilians killed by Serbs on May 22, 1992, where commemorative ceremonies are often held. The location appears intentional, as it is situated right next to the border of Republika Srpska, and just beyond stands a monument dedicated to fallen Serb soldiers from the Goražde commune. At such border points, the urge to assert one's own version of history seems even stronger. Additionally,

³² „Polaganjem cvijeća na spomen obilježje odata počast poginulim pripadnicima policije“, *Bosansko-podrinjski kanton Goražde*, September 21, 2018, <https://www.bpkg.gov.ba/vijesti/72421/polaganjem-cvijeca-na-spomen-obiljezje-odata-pocast-poginulim-pripadnicima-policije> (accessed: 5. 1. 2024).

³³ „Iznad Goražda je večeras podignut ljljan: mi sa Drine ne idemo i uvijek ćemo biti spremni braniti domovinu!“, *Hayat*, June 27, 2023, <https://hayat.ba/iznad-gorazda-je-veceras-podignut-ljljan-mi-sa-drine-ne-idemo-i-uvijek-emo-biti-spremni-braniti-domovinu/969001/> (accessed: 7. 1. 2024).

³⁴ A. Bajramović, „Na brdu iznad Goražda podignut ljljan visok blizu deset metara“, *Dnevni avaz*, June 26, 2023, <https://avaz.ba/vijesti/bih/839744/na-brdu-iznad-gorazda-podignut-ljljan-visok-blizu-deset-metara> (accessed: 4. 1. 2024).

³⁵ „Iznad Goražda je večeras podignut ljljan“.

the events in Lozje (formerly Kokino Selo) hold an important place in the consciousness of Goražde residents – after the extremely brutal and bloody displacement of the Muslim population, a three-month occupation of the village began, which was ended by the Bosniak offensive.³⁶

Memorial Sites near Goražde

The “war for memory” is also taking place in the suburbs of Goražde. In the villages of Jabuka, Vranovina, and Podhranjen, plaques commemorate British soldiers who served in the UNPROFOR mission and died while performing their duties. Moreover, in 2023, a monument in their honor was unveiled in Jabuka, with the British military attaché in attendance.³⁷ The project was funded by the Children of Goražde Foundation, established by British soldiers who once protected this town. Its representatives have reached an agreement with the local school, which they continually support, for its pupils to clean and maintain the area around the monument. However, right next to it is a plaque honoring one of the victims, Ben Hinton, which is awaiting renovation, and the new facility obscures the old one. Meanwhile, the British hope to expand the monument, an idea supported by the Bosniak population. Therefore, it can be concluded that even external projects arise spontaneously and that there is no overarching vision for the development of Bosnian space.

On Mount Grebak, which served as the only link to the outside world during the siege – allowing food to be brought in, weapons and ammunition to be delivered, and the wounded to be evacuated – a monument called the “Ice Procession” (Ledena kolona) was unveiled in 2013 to commemorate the tragedy of winter migrations. From the outset, there were plans to further expand the memorial site by adding a memorial room, springs, fountains, an amphitheater, and sports facilities, creating both a recreational and commemorative space.³⁸ The investment cost was estimated at 380,000 KM, with part promised by the cantonal authorities and the rest planned to come from residents’ contributions. The much-publicized complex has not been built to this day, and the Ice Procession continues to fall victim to acts of vandalism.³⁹ Residents of Goražde speculate about why construction of the memorial center has stalled, since they and the Bosniak diaspora dona-

³⁶ Joe Sacco, *Strefa bezpieczeństwa Goražde* (Warszawa: Mroja Press, 2013), 73–93.

³⁷ Elma Geca, “A memorial to fallen British soldiers of UNPROFOR unveiled at Jabuka site near Goražde”, *Federalna Novinska Agencija*, April 30, 2023, <https://fena.ba/article/1529124/a-memorial-to-fallen-british-soldiers-of-unprofor-unveiled-at-jabuka-site-near-gorazde> (accessed: 8. 1. 2024).

³⁸ „Otkriveno spomen obilježje Ledena kolona“, *Bosansko-podrinjski kanton Goražde* August 19, 2013, <https://www.bpkg.gov.ba/vijesti/30133/otkriveno-spomen-obiljezje-ledena-kolona> (accessed: 4. 1. 2024); A. Bajramović, „Uskoro počinje izgradnja spomen-kompleksa Grebak“, *Dnevni avaz*, February 9, 2016, <https://avaz.ba/vijesti/218902/projekti-uskoro-pocinje-izgradnja-spomen-kompleksa-grebak> (accessed: 4. 1. 2024).

³⁹ „Nastavlja se devastacija spomenika 'Ledena kolona' na Grebku“, *Dnevni avaz*, July 12, 2021, <https://avaz.ba/vijesti/bih/665844/nastavlja-se-devastacija-spomenika-ledena-kolona-na-grebku> (accessed: 7. 1. 2024).

ted money for its construction.⁴⁰ Given the widespread corruption in BiH, the answer seems apparent. Grebak serves as a place of remembrance, with central celebrations called “Grebak – the Road of Life” (Grebak – put života) held every July. The most important part of these celebrations is a hike along a legendary trail, which is also attended by Bosniak Mountain climbing enthusiasts from across Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Meanwhile, the “Forest of Memory 8,372” (Memorijalna šuma 8.372), dedicated to the victims of the Srebrenica massacre, was planted in the village of Posestra. The initiative was launched by the local Muslim community in 2015, twenty years after those tragic events. The project initially included planting 8,372 trees, symbolizing each victim, with a central feature of a large rockery in the shape of a margarita flower – a symbol of the Srebrenica tragedy – beside which an information board was placed.⁴¹ In 2019, the complex was expanded to include a playground, an education and information center, a volleyball court, an artificial lake, and a botanical garden, making it a popular destination for trips for Goraždans.⁴² At that time, the investment cost was estimated at 350,000 KM, and further expansion of the “forest” is planned, including pedestrian and bicycle paths and additional sports fields.⁴³ Posestra combines commemoration and recreation, and every year on July 11, commemorations of the Srebrenica massacre are held there. Since 2015, the annual “Peace Marathon” (Maraton mira) has started from Posestra, covering the route Goražde – Žepa – Srebrenica (the three UN safe areas). The finish line is in Potočari, the site of the Srebrenica crime and now a memorial.⁴⁴

One may wonder how peaceful the message of this race is, since it ritualizes the Bosniak vision of history and only Bosniak competitors participate. Similarly, the Posestra complex is not visited by Serbs. It is significant that the Forest of Memory 8,372 was subjected to vandalism.

About a kilometer away stands a monument erected during communist Yugoslavia, dedicated to the 16th Muslim Brigade (Spomenik XVI muslimanskoj brigadi), a unit of Tito’s partisan forces that distinguished itself by fighting in the Romanija area and liberating Sarajevo. In 2023, Posestra gained another memorial site – “The Shahid Gate” (Šehidska kapija), which bears the names of fallen soldi-

⁴⁰ „Kamen temeljac položen prije 9 godina: Gdje je nestao novac za izgradnju Memorijalnog centra Grebak“, *Patria – BH Novinska agencija*, August 15, 2017, <https://nap.ba/qpost/294136> (accessed: 7. 1. 2024).

⁴¹ Alen Bajramović, „Memorijalna šuma 8.372: Goražde dobija park sjećanja na žrtve genocida“, *Slobodna Evropa*, March 29, 2015, <https://www.slobodnaevropa.org/a/nve-park-sjecanja-na-zrtve-genocida/26926537.html> (accessed: 7. 1. 2024).

⁴² „Širi se kompleks Memorijalne šume 8.372 kod Goražda“. July 03, 2019. <https://faktor.ba/vijest/siri-se-kompleks-memorijalne-sume-8372-kod-gorazda/42571> (accessed: 5. 1. 2024).

⁴³ „Goražde: U memorijalnom kompleksu 'Srebrenica 8372' otvorena botanička bašta“, *Start BiH*, July 5, 2019, <https://startbih.ba/clanak/gorazde-u-memorijalnom-kompleksu-srebrenica-8372-otvorena-botanicka-basta/110589> (accessed: 7. 1. 2024).

⁴⁴ „Atletičari iz Goražda trče maraton mira Goražde – Žepa – Srebrenica u dužini od 180 kilometara“, *Klix*, July 9, 2022, <https://rtvbpk.ba/2022/07/09/atleticari-iz-gorazda-trce-maraton-mira-gorazde-zepa-srebrenica-u-duzini-od-180-kilometara/> (accessed: 8. 1. 2024).

ers from the surrounding villages.⁴⁵ A year earlier, a memorial room dedicated to the 1st Drina Brigade and Zaim Imamović, the legendary commander of the defense of Goražde, was opened at a local school.⁴⁶

It is worth noting that for many years there has been discussion about the need to commemorate Imamović in the center of Goražde. In 2018, the foundation stone was ceremonially laid for the construction of a monument on the street named after Imamović⁴⁷ but construction has not yet begun. However, it appears to be only a matter of time, as funds for this project were collected in 2022.⁴⁸ This again confirms that the “war for memory” is ongoing, with new memorial sites constantly being created and old ones being rebuilt. For now, the Zaimov Do recreational and commemorative complex, several kilometers west of Posestra, as well as a memorial room in the Rorovi recreation area, have been dedicated to Imamović.

Rorovi, founded during the Austro-Hungarian Empire, is located on a hill near the city and has long been a popular destination for walks and a starting point for hikes. After the war, the recreational area also gained a commemorative function. The facility is best known for the exhibition of tanks and equipment taken from Serbian troops during the fighting, but it also features a monument dedicated to the victims of the siege, a playground, and the Zaim Imamović memorial room (Furaj). In 2022, an outdoor photo exhibition was opened, depicting the hardships of life in Goražde during the war.⁴⁹

There are just as many facilities on the road leading from Goražde south toward Foča. In the village of Osanica, which was once the first line of defense for Goražde, there is a monument commemorating local victims from 1992–1995. Next to it are plaques dedicated to two fallen individuals, clearly different in style. Once again, we see that the “war for memory” is guided by its own notion of aesthetics.

Further south, in the town of Ustikolina, just beyond which Republika Srpska begins, there are additional sites attempting at the last moment to proclaim the Bosniak version of historical “truth” to passersby. “The Fočanska Hair česma Memorial Park” (Spomen park Fočanska Hair česma), opened in stages in 2022–

⁴⁵ Alen Bajramović, „Posestra kod Goražda: Otvorena šehidska kapija sa imenima poginulih branitelja“, *Dnevni avaz*, May 20, 2023, <https://avaz.ba/vijesti/bih/831514/posestra-kod-gorazda-otvorena-sehidska-kapija-sa-imenima-poginulih-branitelja> (accessed: 4. 1. 2024).

⁴⁶ „Goražde: Sjećanje na komandanta Zaima Imamovića i njegove saborce“, *Faktor*, May 14, 2022, <https://faktor.ba/bosna-i-hercegovina/aktuelno/gorazde-sjecanje-na-komandanta-zaima-imamovica-i-njegove-saborce/124040> (accessed: 5. 1. 2024).

⁴⁷ „Postavljen temeljac za spomenik komandantu Zaimu Imamoviću“, *Faktor*, October 10, 2018, <https://faktor.ba/vijest/postavljen-temeljac-za-spomenik-komandantu-zaimu-imamovicu/6821> (accessed: 7. 1. 2024).

⁴⁸ „Uskoro spomenik legendarnom komandantu Zaimu Imamoviću u Goraždu, evo kako će izgledati“, *Klix*, February 11, 2022, <https://www.klix.ba/vijesti/bih/uskoro-spomenik-legendarnom-komandantu-zaimu-imamovicu-u-gorazdu-evo-kako-ce-izgledati/220211103> (accessed: 8. 1. 2024).

⁴⁹ „Goražde: Na spomen izletištu Rorovi otvorena stalna postavka ratnih eksponata i fotografija“, *Klix*, September 17, 2022, <https://www.klix.ba/vijesti/bih/gorazde-na-spomen-izletistu-rorovi-otvorena-stalna-postavka-ratnih-eksponata-i-fotografija/220917029> (accessed: 7. 1. 2024).

2023, is a complex of facilities commemorating the Bosniak victims from Foča – a city that, after being conquered, was Serbized and brutally cleansed of its Muslim heritage by Serbs.⁵⁰ It consists of a fountain stylized as a clock tower, which is a symbol of Foča; a monument dedicated to 625 people missing during the war; a monument commemorating Foča concentration camp prisoners; a monument dedicated to women who were victims of the war; and a mini-garden with roses in memory of the souls of innocent victims. There are also several gazebos where travelers can rest. Even before the official opening of the facility, it was vandalized.

Nearby, there is a monument honoring the first two victims from Ustikolina – April 19, 1992, and next to it, a spring commemorates Sulejman Sobo, who died in 1998. Shahid Gate (Šehidska kapija), dedicated to all [Bosniak – M.R.] defenders of BiH from the Foča commune, is located closer to the center. The stone flower pots nearby bear the inscription “Srebrenica 11.07.1995”, which likely signifies solidarity with the victims of this terrible crime. However, including Srebrenica in a monument dedicated to local victims may raise questions about whom it is meant to commemorate, especially since the Forest of Remembrance in Posestra is less than 20 kilometers away. This raises the question of whether the intention is more about expressing the Bosniak narrative about Srebrenica⁵¹ on the outskirts of the BiH Federation.

The range of memorial sites in this small village includes a neglected plaque dedicated to Tito’s partisans. This further demonstrates the poorly planned nature of investments in commemoration. New monuments are added every year, but there are no funds to renovate the old ones. Additionally, many memorial sites are duplicated, and numerous demonstrations honoring victims fuel a cycle of hatred on the other side, leading to acts of vandalism.

Other memorial sites

The rich array of memorial sites in Goražde and its immediate vicinity described here has not been fully covered in this text. Numerous plaques, springs, and Shahid’s gates in cemeteries scattered around the city were not mentioned. “The monument to the Blessed Martyrs of Drina” (Drinske mučenice) – the nuns from the monastery in Pale who, in December 1941, were driven to Goražde by the Chetniks and then murdered – was deliberately omitted, as it does not fit into the Serb-Bosnian “war for memory”. It is worth noting, however, that as of 2021, construction is underway on a Catholic church dedicated to the Blessed Martyrs of Drina, who were beatified in 2011 in Sarajevo, and Goražde is visited by pilgrims from around the world (Kćeri Božje ljubavi). Without a doubt, the story of the nuns tortured to death by Chetniks serves the interests of the local (Bosniak) authorities, not only because of its anti-Serbian aspect. It also helps reinforce the

⁵⁰ M. Falski, *op. cit.*, 139–148.

⁵¹ The issue of the events in Srebrenica is the central axis of Serb-Bosnian memory conflicts. While in the BiH Federation this crime is called genocide, in the RS it is treated as one of many tragic events, and at the same time it articulates its own victims from nearby Bratunac and the surrounding area.

narrative of multiculturalism and peaceful coexistence, which is eagerly emphasized to the international community.

Finally, it is impossible to briefly address the monuments erected during communist Yugoslavia. Some were mentioned earlier when discussing the most recent memorials commemorating the war of 1992–1995, but others also deserve mention. After Tito's death, in the village of Mravinjac on the outskirts of Goražde, the local population built a park dedicated to the Marshal. The park includes 88 pine trees symbolizing his 88 years of life, a large red star, a portrait of the leader, and, next to it, the flags of Bosnia and Goražde, which can still be seen today.⁵² However, the complex is primarily associated with the gigantic TITO inscription towering over the route to Foča, which has appeared on various Yugoslav nostalgic websites for years.

While the park commemorating Tito has managed to survive amid new identity narratives, others are falling into decline due to a lack of funds and willingness to renovate them. For example, on Hranjen Hill overlooking Goražde, a memorial park containing the graves of Tito's partisans of various nationalities, including Serbs and Bosniaks, is falling into disrepair.⁵³ It could become a platform for building interethnic reconciliation, but neither side has the will.

⁵² Elma Geca, „Kako je opstao Titov spomen-park u Mravinjcu?“, *Al Jazeera*, May 2, 2016, <https://balkans.aljazeera.net teme/2016/5/2/kako-je-opstao-titov-spomen-park-u-mravinjcu> (accessed: 8. 1. 2024).

⁵³ „Spomen park u Goraždu propada“, *Radio Slobodna Evropa*, August 5, 2015, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?vUSiDwo3Q4qw> (accessed: 8. 1. 2024).

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“War for memory” in Bosnia and Herzegovina on the Example of the City of Goražde

Summary: The “War for Memory” has been ongoing in Bosnia and Herzegovina since 1995. While there were initially opportunities to build a supra-ethnic community, in recent years (approximately since 2010) there has been a steady intensification of nationalist discourses, one dimension of which is the politics of memory. This involves highlighting the tragedy of one’s own group and its victims while denying responsibility for crimes. As has been observed, in impoverished Bosnia and Herzegovina, investments are made in memorial sites that are antagonistic rather than conciliatory. Nationalist-oriented politicians and activists are not interested in reconciliation or building shared prosperity, but in defending their own rights, which inevitably strengthens divisions. Memorial sites, although they often officially promote peace and are theoretically intended as warnings to prevent future atrocities, in practice increase ethnic distance and deepen mental barriers. The commemorative ceremonies held at these sites perpetuate antagonistic narratives, contributing to the deepening paralysis of the state. In one of the poorest countries in Europe, there are many pressing needs for which funding is lacking, while monuments, parks, and plaques are often duplicated, sometimes coexisting alongside buildings from the Yugoslav era that now lack funds for renovation. The construction of these sites is sometimes accompanied by corrupt practices, money laundering, or theft. Unfortunately, new memorial sites continue to be created, and more will likely be designed, further deepening the aesthetic and spatial chaos. This article presents sites in the city of Goražde (and its immediate vicinity), the easternmost part of the BiH Federation, surrounded on three sides by Republika Srpska. In such border areas, the need to assert one’s own identity narrative is even stronger, and the people of Goražde feel like a promontory of Bosnianness on the map of BiH. The author aimed to show, on one hand, the phenomenon of reproducing nationalist discourse, which strengthens divisions between Bosniaks and Serbs, and on the other, the excessive and ill-considered saturation of the landscape with new places of memory. Considering the size of the town, the number of such sites seems very large, but given the current trend, it is likely that new ones will appear soon. It can be said that the “war for memory” is costly, but the impoverished society willingly invests in it.

Keywords: Goražde, Bosnia and Herzegovina, site of memory, collective memory