

# **An archive for the future – activism in the field of memory politics in Mostar**

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## **Introduction**

*MOSTARSKA HURQUALYA - (Ne)Zaboravljeni grad*. With this title shining from a pdf-version on a laptop-screen, we, two anthropology-students from Göttingen (Germany), started our research about this book-project in spring 2020.

*The (Un)Forgotten City*, as it translates into English, is a book-project that gathers together several stories and pictures about the Partisan Monument, a necropolis for the Yugoslav partisans that fell in World War II, in the city of Mostar, Bosnia-Herzegovina (BiH). The book includes images of art performances in front of intricately designed stone murals, black and white photos of people dressed in 70s era clothing posing for a family album, and lots of diverse anecdotes from these times up to the present day.

Clashing with these seemingly peaceful moments, the reader soon comes across pictures of fascist symbols sprayed on some of the monument's walls, as well as various other traces of vandalism. We also read quotations from Mostar residents speaking of the Partisan Monument as disturbing or just unimportant for the people living in Mostar. Indeed, according to our initial online research, clashes and ruptures can often appear to be the main characteristic of the Partisan Monument itself, or even of the city of Mostar. However, this is not the whole story. Based on the preface of the book and what we later heard from the editors themselves, one motive behind the project was to show that Mostar is not as divided as it is often represented, for example, in international research and media discourses. Some of the visible changes to the monument, such as signs of vandalism and deterioration, may be perceived as fitting with such images of division. However, the diverse and mostly invisible everyday practices of people, which do not necessarily leave marks on the monument, can challenge these images.

Coming from and living in a country that is quite ignorant about certain histories and politics from outside central-Europe, we were initially unaware of the divisions referred to here. Little by little, and thanks to our interlocutors and our ethnographic research done so far, the phenomena shaping the context around the Partisan Monument and activism in Mostar became more visible to us.

In our research, we encountered the complex terrain of the politics of memory, which has been analyzed in the context of Mostar by Monica Palmberger. Palmberger focuses on the doing of history: how certain events from the past become highlighted and others neglected, and thus how certain visions of the past become connected with politics in the present or visions of the future (Palmberger, 2016, p.19). This approach can help us to understand historical and political ruptures and explore the effect they have on the treatment of the Partisan Monument in Mostar: “Still, it is the actor in the present that gives meaning to the past [...] Generational identity is constructed by sharing memories but also by collectively silencing them” (Palmberger, 2016, p.9).

Under this lens, we then see a monument that comes from an overthrown Yugoslav society, where all nations and ethnic identities had been proclaimed as united in brotherhood. Furthermore, this monument is located in a city that is said to be somewhere where this principle has indeed been experienced by the people, and that even embodies these ideals in its design (cf. Ilić, Škrbić Alempijević, 2018, p.78). The 1992-1995 war is a key example of the kind of political rupture that Palmberger speaks of. During this conflict, the former common identity of the Yugoslav people, which had developed through the resistance to fascist occupation in World War II, became divided into several separate identities. With this division into ethno-national categories (‘the Croats’, ‘the Serbs’ and ‘the Bosniaks’), the common past of living together collides with narratives involving these nations’ desires for autonomy (cf. Bevan, 2006, p.8, Palmberger, 2008, p.361). Any reminder of this common past and identity, such as the Partisan Monument, is inevitably neglected within these narratives of ethno-national division. “It is a site where cutting ties with the past is made visible” is the conclusion of Kristina Ilić and Nevena Škrbić Alempijević. Here they refer to the top down policies and discourses surrounding the Partisan Monument (Ilić, Škrbić Alempijević, 2018, p.98).

This is where the book-project *The (Un)Forgotten City* by several activists from Mostar, BiH

and around the world can be seen as an intervention from the bottom up. Collecting diverse memories, relations, practices, and perspectives of the Partisan Monument, which go beyond the surface of damage and vandalism, they show that there is more than what dominant representations tell us.

Considering the book-project as an “activist archive” (Lee, 2016, p.30), we wanted to find out about the challenges that such activism faces. What kind of memory politics does such a grassroots initiative call for and how do the activists approach the highly controversial and sensitive perceptions of the past?

In addressing these questions, we first see that this particular activist archive does more than just add a single story to the official frameworks for remembering the Yugoslav past. Instead, it puts side by side a variety of different, sometimes even conflicting recollections of everyday life in Yugoslavia, using the example of the Partisan Monument. In doing so, the project presents an excellent example of an activist archive, which aims to make new links possible between official history, collective memories, and personal experiences. Furthermore, it deconstructs conventional images of archives as exclusively concerning ‘the past’.

Secondly, we suggest that *The (Un)forgotten City* is not solely an expression of nostalgia for the Yugoslav era. Rather, this project presents an active attempt to uncover memories of everyday life in Yugoslav Mostar. It aims to save these memories from being forgotten. as they open up alternative visions of the future for the city’s inhabitants. Thereby, the activists behind the project promote a politics of memory that reflects the complexity, heterogeneity, and diversity of personal experiences of the Yugoslav past, which makes space for diverse post-Yugoslav futures.

The sources of our information about *The (Un)forgotten City*, as well as the Partisan Monument, were our interlocutors, who we spoke to exclusively in online-interviews, as our research happened during the COVID-19 pandemic. Two of them are the main activists and editors of the book-project, Marko Barišić and Aida Murtić. They are both local researchers and activists and are part of a diverse network of people who were involved in the process of creating the book-project. Another member of this network is Vlatka, also from Mostar, whom you will also find cited in this article.

## **The Partisan Monument in Mostar**

As mentioned in the introduction of this text, the existence of the Partisan Monument underwent one main rupture: the 1992-1995 war in Bosnia-Herzegovina. During the socialist era, the monument represented the ethnically diverse city of Mostar, because it was originally designed and built with the aim of uniting all of the fallen partisans of the city, regardless of their religion (Ilić, Škrbić Alempijević, 2018, p.75). If we take into account the fact that the monument does not include any religious or classic socialist symbols, it becomes clear that its architect, Bogdan Bogdanović, created it not exclusively as a place for remembering “but also as a place of being” (Gačanica, 2020, p.63).

Nonetheless, the heritage it carries played a crucial role within a Yugoslav identity based on the proclaimed equality of all nations. However, since the 1992-1995 war, one can observe an ethnicization of heritage (Wollentz, Barišić, Sammar, 2019, p.199). One singular Yugoslav history has been replaced by three histories (‘Bosniak’, ‘Croat’, and ‘Serbian’) divided according to ethno-national logic. In the postwar and post-socialist period, “new heroes, new victims, [and] new foundations of identity” have displaced the formerly common ones (Gačanica, 2020, p.63). Therefore, we must consider the (re)building of mosques and churches (Wollentz, Barišić, Sammar, 2019, p.199; Carabelli 2018, p.1) or the renaming of streets and erection of new monuments (Palmberger, 2008, p.361) in the city of Mostar as tools for the creation of collective identities through the construction of heritage (Wollentz, Barišić, Sammar, 2019, p.200). Kristina Ilić and Nevena Škrbić Alempijević describe the postwar period in the following way:

“The integral part of memory production, which was intended to point to the difference (but also the higher value, authenticity, and a higher merit of the city belonging to a certain ethnic group) with respect to the other part of town, was creating the collective forgetting, particularly of those episodes in history where ethnic, religious, and national affiliations of the city’s residents were vague and subsumed under a monolithic category of Yugoslav identity.” (Ilić, Škrbić Alempijević, 2018, p.85)

The Partisan Monument was demolished during the war and its renovation has received little attention or financial support in comparison to the renovation of, for example, the Old Bridge, which is mentioned in this quote from Marko, one of our interlocutors:

“Mostar actually had two symbols. Today Mostar seemingly has only one symbol and this is the Old Bridge. But before the war Mostar had two symbols. This was the other symbol. You know and every time somebody would come to Mostar, you know, you would take people to the old

bridge and to this monument. So, it seems so devastating for people from Mostar to see the monument in this shape.” (Marko)

Funds for restoration or the listing of the Partisan Monument as a national monument have been mainly organized by antifascist veterans. In addition to the destruction that occurred during the war, there have been continuous instances of vandalism. These mainly include fascist symbols and statements against communists or Bosniaks, as well as the destruction of tombstones and sculptures. Ilić and Škrbić Alempijević analyze these instances of vandalism as symbolic battles concerning the question: whose city is it? (Ilić, Škrbić Alempijević, 2018, p.88). In the postwar period, the monument has become a battlefield of clashing worldviews: initially a symbol of Yugoslav unity, it has been transformed by symbols of division:

“Broken, neglected, dislocated, re-interpreted, decapitated, stolen [...] Partiza [...] is a place made of layers of Mostar's wraths, revisionisms, violent entries of new ('more primeval') identities, violently overriding fragile attempts at preservation.” (Gačanica: “Hide-and-peek game”, see: [http://www.dwp-balkan.org/en/blog\\_one.php?cat\\_id=8&text\\_id=7](http://www.dwp-balkan.org/en/blog_one.php?cat_id=8&text_id=7))

Despite the neglect, ignorance, and cultural battles over the meaning of the monument, there have been at least three restorations between 2005 and 2009 (Gačanica, 2020, p.70). Furthermore, different people organize regular cleaning actions. Lastly, the Monument is still used for the annual commemoration practices of the “Association of Anti-Fascists and Fighters of the National Liberation War” (NOR) Mostar, and the “Federation of Anti-Fascists and National Liberation Army” (SABNOR) (Stadler, 2017, p.17; Gačanica, 2020, p.69).

Additionally, there is a wide array of activities that take place at the Monument. As well as the previously mentioned art performances, there are excursions by the Mostar Summer Youth Program to encounter historical but also aesthetic aspects of the monument. There are also the many diverse individual encounters that people have with the monument. To make these encounters more visible became the objective of the book-project for our interlocutors.

### ***The (Un)forgotten City as an archive***

“[...] maybe we can't change anything today, but if we collect some things and we build [an] archive for [the] future, you know, people will know it was possible. There were people who were doing some things [...] it's very important to keep the door open for possibility of change. Even though we don't see the change here.” (Aida)

Echoing these words from Aida<sup>1</sup>, we consider the book-project to be an example of an activist archive. Here we refer to the concept that was introduced by Doreen Lee (2016) and later used by Larisa Kurtović (2018) in relation to the post-socialist context of ex-Yugoslavia. Since Aida, Marko, and others involved in the project have academic backgrounds, they were familiar with this anthropological perspective on archives and they present this perspective through the medium of the book. But what is this type of archive about?

Doreen Lee first used the term in the context of the transition to a post-Suharto Indonesia. She approaches activism “as lived experience to show how the intensity of political life bridges public and private domains, and individual and collective memories” (Lee, 2016, p.3). This understanding of activism highlights the interactions and relationships between official histories and collective memory. Through activities organized as part of the Indonesian student movement, such as film screenings, the students were reminded of their own power and how it manifests in a society in transition to democracy. Thus, in connection to Jacques Derridas’ description of an “archive fever” (Lee, 2016, p.11), Lee explains how the context of this Indonesian student movement formed a particular conception of archives.

“Pemuda<sup>2</sup> fever suggests that Indonesian students had such an attachment to a historical understanding of their present-day selves that they sought to document each action, each gesture, at every turn, through every medium available.” (Lee, 2016, p.29)

Consequently, the students’ impulsive action created the possibility of opening up critical discourse to counter-hegemonic imaginings and forming the archive as a “parallel system of political enunciations by youth” (Lee, 2016, p.30). Therefore, this type of Indonesian activism was essential for political demands and through the activist archive the student movement was able to mediate political reforms. Thus, the idea of this activist archive contains both,

“the actual, material archives kept and mobilized by several generations of Indonesian youth activists, as well as the more diffuse ways in which the political memories of earlier moments of protest come to shape and guide new political projects.” (Kurtović, 2018, p. 5)

Larisa Kurtović also makes use of the concept of the activist archive. She argues that the point of the archive is not merely to “capture a form of repetitive, nostalgic desire to document and assemble traces of a past political project in a ‘historically charged present’” (Kurtović, 2018, p.5; cf. Lee, 2016, p.11). Rather, it is more about the archive fever. Hence, she analyzes the

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<sup>1</sup>One of the three authors, who we describe in more detail in the introduction.

<sup>2</sup>Indonesian word for youth.

work of contemporary artists and feminist activists in BiH. A feminist artist collective from Sarajevo called *Crvena* created the Archive of Antifascist Struggle of Women of BiH and Yugoslavia<sup>3</sup> with an aim to “recover a form of transformational historical subjectivity” (Kurtović, 2018, p.1). These activist archives are repositories of neglected ideas, as well as being “new kinds of political stages where post-socialist countries have had to negotiate their dominant historical narratives” (Kurtović, 2018, p.2). After 2014, and following a wave of socio-economic protests in BiH, new forms of political critique emerged that revisited (the ideas of) the old socialist era. These archives can be seen as places of critique, where “the expectant and conjured [...] dreams of comforting futures and foreboding of future failures” (Kurtović, 2018, p.4) can be expressed. They attempt to go beyond the two poles of neoliberal nationalist perspectives, on one hand, and the glorifying of socialism, on the other. Thus, Kurtović and Lee point to the new possibilities that may emerge if we rethink the conceptualization of the archives formed by different activists and recognize how powerful and transformative activist archives can be.

Starting from this understanding, we interpret the *The (Un)forgotten City* as an activist archive that speaks to the ethno-nationalist hegemony of the country. The authors themselves are taking part in an “activist experiment” (as Aida told us in the interview), attempting to form a wider perspective and linking together the local, the national, and the transnational. Through this activist archive of everyday life, which includes a variety of experiences and memories, they give a voice to the residents of Mostar as storytellers and claim a space for everyday history. With *The (Un)forgotten City*, they produce knowledge of everyday life connections and of the events surrounding the monument. The book presents the Partisan Monument as a place of reconnection with the past, but also of visions for the future (as we have heard from Marko in our interview). One example of the diverse personal associations with the monument is seen in the conversation between a young woman, Agnes, and an older man (name unknown) who defended the city of Mostar during WWII. They met at an honor march to mark the anniversary of the liberation of the city:

“After he told us his life story, the only thing he bade us to do was to try and preserve something he once defended, as he has no strength left in him to come back here. So, I think that was what I recall most vividly, I don’t know if I will ever be able to forget this. After all that, I wondered why people refuse to protect something as important as the Partisan Cemetery.”

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<sup>3</sup>See more about it at: <https://afzarhiv.org/>.

(Agnes Čišić, *The (Un) Forgotten City*, p. 75)

Because of vivid personal experiences like this, it was even more important for the authors to pursue connections to the monument that would otherwise merge into one another because no state or official institution would collect them.

“Things, which would, if we don’t collect them, look like as they never happened. [...] It is a powerful reminder that shared life was normality.” (Aida)

As Aida told us in one interview, not the conventional forms, but the new forms of collaboration and performances matter to them. Therefore, the activists go beyond the paradigm of ethno-national division. The authors refuse to portray the Partisan Monument as an object that is defined by ethno-national divisions and their either-or positions.

“It is like writing a thesis on capitalism, where the aim of the thesis can be 'have it done' or the aim can be to get a document that whoever gets to it, can obtain the impression not just of 'how things are' but also how things might be, and in such a shape, inspire the reader to do something further with the information learned.” (Marko)

This statement from Marko reiterates Kurtović’s idea of the activist archive, and further supports the need to address different levels of connections to the monument in the book-project. It also emphasizes the importance of engagement with the inhabitants of Mostar and shows that the project is about finding an active way to collect more visions of the future. Furthermore, it is about finding alternative ways of preserving and representing memories and making use of a more-than-one perspective, as Aida described it to us in our interview, as their working method to effectively engage in polyvalent discourses.

### **Challenges of the activism around the book**

To make this complex and ambiguous reality around the Partisan Monument visible in contrast to dominant presentations, the activists behind the book-project had to deal with some challenges.

“It could be tricky to approach a sensitive topic like this one. People who are next door neighbours have different views on Yugoslavia and its monuments. Some are neutral, some are very critical and some glorify it.” (Vlatka)

This sensitivity that Vlatka mentions regarding the different perceptions of the monument’s

heritage points to the challenges that activists in Mostar, more generally, face. As our interlocutor Marko and his colleagues Gustav Wollentz and Nourah Sammar explain in a case study about youth activism in Mostar, politically active people have to deal with the hegemony of the ethno-nationalist division in the field of politics (Wollentz, Barišić, Sammar 2019, p.197-215). In their case study, a monument to miners was established through bottom-up activism in a neighborhood of Mostar that has a strong connection to the industrial heritage of socialist Yugoslavia (ibid, p.201). Two former monuments in this neighborhood, built during the socialist era to honor miners, had been demolished during the war and/or removed afterwards. A new monument was then erected commemorating Croat soldiers and thus the former workers' identity was replaced by a nationalist symbol (ibid, p.204). It was clear to the activists that if they contested the new monument and thus ethno-nationalist politics of the so-called Croat-faction of the city, these politicians would frame this as the activism of Bosniaks, and take advantage of it for their divisive narratives (ibid). Therefore, they attempted to counter such policies implemented from above by ethno-national elites with a more bottom-up approach, integrating the community of concerned people in the neighborhood. The activists aimed to make collective values visible through the new monument, values that had been obscured by the silencing and removal of what remained of the common (socialist) past of the neighborhood. Thus, the activists intervened in the polarized field of politics and had to be highly aware of the output of their activism.

“But for Partisan Memorial you can't easily put a label. [S]o that's why [...] when they try to delegitimize it they say it's an evil communism because that's the way you can delegitimize it [...] there is what people think and there is what politicians and institutions think and do, those are two different things [...] institutions are just repeating powerful voices of ethno-national elites, they are trying to solidify group belongings [...] and they are trying to explain that there is no alternative, that what we have now is the only possible reality.” (Aida)

The challenges described above also influenced the activism of the people behind the book-project. The antifascist meaning of the Partisan Monument (which is neglected by dominant Croat history-claiming) is referred to in some parts of the book, but it is not at the center of the book's representations of the monument. Nor did it appear to be the main motivation for our interlocutors' engagement. The people we spoke to mentioned diverse motives for why they became active, such as the appreciation of the monument's aesthetic.

Nevertheless, one of the main motives behind the project seems to be anti-nationalism. The activists have a critical standpoint towards the ethno-national politics of division in Mostar

and BiH and are afraid of the loss of a common past belonging to the people of the city.

“And with our project and with everything we were trying to say ‘No! We had a different life before!’, and maybe even if there are no alternatives possible, this is not [...] the only reality that exists. [...] and we hope it should not be like that, that it can be different [...] options should be open [...]” (Aida)

Because the authors and editors of the book-project want to pave the way for a future without these ethno-national divisions, the Yugoslav past plays a crucial role for their activism. As Aida describes, one of their main goals is to intervene in the exclusionary narratives of memory politics promoted by nationalists and to make visible that there was indeed a time where the coexistence of the people was not characterized by division. They aim to show that it is possible to achieve this again in the future. Hence, although they care very much about the Partisan Monument and have pursued this project with the goal of preserving it, the activists also integrated the opinions of people who don't care about the monument, and even some who want it to be removed. By including these perspectives, they are more inclusive regarding the controversies and ambiguities towards the socialist/antifascist past within the current population of Mostar. It seems to us that this effectively allows the activists to not get caught in the division-paradigm.

“We wanted to have a little bit of a balanced approach where we would not only ask people about Partiza who remember it fondly 'Oooh this is where my youth-pictures have been taken, etc' but also those who think differently [...] I think that gives people, especially outsiders, a little bit of a clearer idea of why some see the monument as a problem and why it was unfortunately neglected by politicians for a long time.” (Vlatka)

When asked how they decided on this approach for the book-project, Vlatka refers to “good anthropology”, which would always try to show more than one perspective on a certain context. This shows how the anthropological, or more generally the academic, background of the activists had a great impact on the whole book-project. They are even familiar with Kurtović's definition of activist archive and use it as a term themselves when they talk about the book. It seems that this anthropologically influenced knowledge has helped them to deal with the challenges that their intervention in the politics of memories around the Partisan Monument had to face.

In addition to the challenges explained above, another thing that influences their activism is conceptions of so-called civil society in Mostar.

## **Civil society concept: negotiation field**

Concerning the concept of civil society in this context, we find a complex field of negotiations and socio-spatial relations. The dynamics around the monument are influenced by many different actors: antifascist veterans organizing petitions, funding and commemorations; the city, as owner and responsible for maintenance and protection via Agency Old Town Mostar (Agencija Stari grad Mostar); and the Institute for the Protection of Monuments within the Federal Ministry of Culture and Sport (the body responsible for any expenses relating to the monument).

However, the activists saw the need to get politically active for the Partisan Monument, as its maintenance and restorations did not seem to be being covered by the official institutions. The whole complex of responsible institutions and official budgets seemed to be lacking transparency and the activists had no trust in them. Marko told us that it really depended on individuals within the institutions, some of whom made a personal effort to maintain the Partisan Monument.

“So I want to say that in all this misery of the institutions that are left after the Yugoslav collapse, still here and there you can find a person who is willing to do something, so without this person I really don’t know what I would do, he really helped, despite the institution on a collective level is not doing its job.” (Marko)

Considering classic concepts of civil society, one would imagine NGOs being active on behalf of a site like the Partisan Monument, which has definite historic and aesthetic value, in addition to the official state institutions that are responsible for it. But we didn’t hear of any NGOs working to maintain the Partisan Monument and as the following quote from Marko shows, the role of NGOs, as classic civil society actors, must be questioned critically:

“And I was always asking, you know, ‘what are all these people doing?’ you know, ‘what’s happening? What’s this NGO? What are they talking about?’. So complete blank in a town that has, remember this note, 700 NGOs. *Mostar has 700 NGOs*. [...] and in that kind of a town I didn’t even really know what NGO actually was and what was happening and how do you even get to them. [...] So, I just want to tell you how little these people are engaged with the local community and how they are not existing. They live in a parallel universe [...] and that’s why I’m not so happy about this work, because it just perpetuates and doesn’t really resolve anything.” (Marko)

The activists have a critical standpoint regarding NGOs, as there are so many of them in the city of Mostar, but they are seemingly not active in favor of local needs. Still, the publishing

of the book depended on personal contacts to some people working for two NGOs that applied for funding for the printing costs. This was mainly due to the precarious financial situation the activists found themselves in, which meant that publishing the book with private money was not possible.

The activism around the book-project shows that what is usually considered civil society is not capable of maintaining the Partisan Monument or preventing it from deteriorating, which leads people like Marko and others to get involved. The previously mentioned restoration policies and budgets additionally reveal that the benefit from civil society resources is highly dependent on political agendas. The Partisan Monument, as one of the two symbols of the city, was not restored, while the Old Bridge and other (mainly religious) monuments were. Here, international players like UNESCO or the EU also come into play and it seems that the socialist heritage of a site like the Partisan Monument is not only a problem for local elites. The selective memory politics of the EU, which peculiarly obscures the socialist period, has also been analyzed in the context of Sarajevo by Piro Rexhepi (for example: cf. Rexhepi, 2018).

The lack of trust in state institutions and NGOs seems to push people to get active themselves. They are not only 'passive space-users' but have the capacity to (re)negotiate their political positions and their identity. In addition to the book-project, there are also different online platforms and communities of people from Mostar, where they exchange lots of content connected to the prewar history of the city and more concrete of the Partisan Monument. There exists a facebook-group called "Partizansko spomen-groblje - Help to preserve famous WW2 Memorial in Mostar" which has over 2000 members and where you can find present-day photos and comments on activities at the Monument. In this way, they keep the heritage of Mostar, based on their life experiences and memories, in a self-organized space. What connects them is a nostalgia that they share. This nostalgia's potential for inspiring action will be explored in the following section.

### **Role of nostalgia**

Monica Palmberger analyzed nostalgia during her fieldwork between 2005-2008 in Mostar as a "widespread social phenomenon" (Palmberger, 2008, p.357). A certain 'Yugo-nostalgia'

can be observed as a “counter-discourse to the respective dominant public discourse” (ibid) in all the Yugoslav successor states. Here, the Yugoslav past is contrasted to the present and future, which are both shaped by insecurity, and thus the past becomes something to be longed for. The phenomenon of nostalgia as it is used in Palmberger’s analysis is not exclusively directed backwards, but is strongly connected with visions of the future (cf. ibid). As mentioned above, there are some platforms, mostly online, where people from Mostar share nostalgia for the prewar times of the city. These platforms and what was happening there actually inspired the activists of the book-project. However, the activists also question these platforms’ potential for action.

It seems that the activists themselves do not identify with this particular ‘Yugo-nostalgia’, as they were born shortly before, during, or even after the dissolution of Yugoslavia and thus have few memories, if any, of that time. However, they connect with the nostalgia shared by many people from their city and this plays a crucial role for the utopia they formulate. The Partisan Monument itself thus becomes the linking agent, the “powerful reminder [...] that shared life was normality” (cf. Aida). Additionally, the book-project includes photos and stories of the ways in which people currently spend time at, and connect to, the Partisan Monument in their everyday life. Thus, the activists of the book-project strengthen the perspective of everyday life as neither the framework for the repetition of the usual, nor the framework for violence, but rather, as the framework for resisting and questioning the dominant ethno-nationalist paradigm. Contrasting the (nostalgic) memories of the Partisan Monument, and how people in Mostar perceive it in their everyday-life, with dominant presentations of the monument, the book-project transforms notions of nostalgia into an anchor for a utopia that contradicts present-day images of how (and how not) to live together.

## **Conclusion**

Heritage and collective memory are ongoing processes, with many different actors highlighting certain narratives that help to construct particular identities. At the same time other narratives are marginalized. Thus, the past of a certain region, city, nation, or people can be envisioned in various and possibly contradictory ways depending on their collectivities and their (political) visions of the present and for the future. In the context of the Partisan Monument in Mostar, there are complex ideological struggles that are ongoing. The same

thing can be said for the engagement of people in the city. The monument is surrounded by changing associations, meanings, and by the dynamics of the city. It seems to be influenced, on the one hand, by non-transparent activities involving the management of administration and financial flows on a local and international level. On the other hand, there are the people of Mostar, the grassroots, whose perceptions, and shared realities are notably different.

The book-project *MOSTARSKA HURQUALYA - (Ne)Zaboravljeni grad* is a powerful tool to reveal this contrast and to make space for a more-than-one perspective. As an activist archive, it not only gathers nostalgia for the prewar era of the Partisan Monument (and the city). It also brings together present-day connections and alternative imaginations for the future. This type of activist archive is extremely relevant to current anthropological discussions concerning the potential of new forms of archives, helping us to rethink our conventional understandings of archives.

The book-project includes diverse and contradicting visions regarding the past and the present (of the Partisan Monument). These are represented in a sort of mosaic, which allows each of them to be visible. Thus, the activists behind the book-project open up an inclusive space for the complex realities that exist in Mostar. Although strongly sharing the desire to rehabilitate the Partisan Monument as a safe place for just being, as its architect had originally designed it to be, the people we spoke to also see meaning in the beauty of the place, its peculiarity, and the possibility for social change that it represents. For them, despite policies of division, the Partisan Monument still represents a place of unity.

Hence, the book-project and the activism surrounding it can inspire grassroots initiatives all around the globe that are facing similarly complex contexts for their activism. Particularly in regard to the rise of nationalisms, their example can remind all of us how fast the common sense of communities can be turned around. *The (Un)forgotten City* shows us how strong bottom-up anti-nationalist interventions can become if they manage to avoid lapsing into the same mechanisms of exclusion. Furthermore, we see that anthropological insights can help activists to adapt their strategies to complex fields of politics. For archives, this means actively going beyond dominant representations, and thus doing justice to the various ambiguities that are encountered.

## **Acknowledgment:**

Although our field research was not possible under the circumstances of the corona virus pandemic, we were able to explore opinions and impressions of politics and activities around the Partisan Monument thanks to our interlocutors. They made it possible for us to gather vivid images of the monument and the context around it.

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