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#WarCrimes #PostConflictJustice #Balkans: Youth, Performance Activism and the Politics of Memory

Arnaud Kurze*

<A>Abstract¹

While literature in transitional justice has addressed conventional retributive and restorative justice mechanisms, scholarship focusing on the rise in youth activism to confront war crimes is underdeveloped. This article draws on over two dozen in-depth interviews with youth activist leaders across the former Yugoslavia, focusing on their performance-based campaigns. I explain why the emergence of transitional justice youth activism in the Balkans falls short of the significant institutional reforms of earlier youth movement mobilizations in the region. I also throw light on why their performance activism is distinct from practices of older, established human rights organizations in the region. Notwithstanding, I argue that this performance-based advocacy work has fuelled the creation of a new spatiality of deliberation – so-called strategic confrontation spaces – to contest the culture of impunity and challenge the politics of memory in the former Yugoslavia.

<A>Keywords: youth activism, social movements, politics of memory, performance art, Balkans

<A>INTRODUCTION

In the early 1990s the breakup of the former Yugoslavia fuelled violent ethnic conflicts across the entire region. Today, over 20 years later, southeast European societies still bear deep scars despite many

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retributive and restorative postconflict justice efforts. These also affect less obvious victims, such as youth who did not necessarily experience the violence but who suffer from its lingering consequences. Instead of surrendering to feelings of apathy,² however, many of these young adults actively engage in human rights work to account for war crimes and human rights violations. Their work differs from more traditional forms of transitional justice mechanisms, drawing particularly from performance art. This article examines the emerging role of youth activism in postconflict societies across the former Yugoslavia and explains *why* less conventional forms of activism have become the preferred strategy choice among the new generation of activists. It also seeks to map *how* younger generations – who often did not directly witness the ethnic conflicts in the 1990s or were too young to understand what was happening – deal with the past.

The rise of recent youth activism to cope with mass atrocities and injustice is part of a number of efforts across the region to reckon with the past. It complements years of postconflict justice processes in the Balkan region, initiated by a variety of protagonists such as governments, international institutions and civil society.³ These actors put in place various mechanisms to account for mass atrocities committed during the conflict, including international trials in The Hague, domestic trials in many of the former states of Yugoslavia and several truth commission attempts. Over the past 10 years, for instance, several domestic human rights organizations advocated for a transnational fact-finding body, also known as the Coalition for RECOM.⁴ Reminiscent of many other transitional justice actors, the main reason for youth activists'

² Sarah Warshauer Freedman and Dino Abazovic, 'Growing up during the Balkan Wars of the 1990s,' in *International Perspectives on Youth Conflict and Development*, ed. Colette Daiute, Zeynep Beykont, Craig Higson-Smith and Larry Nucci (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006); Jessica Greenberg, "There's Nothing Anyone Can Do about It": Participation, Apathy, and "Successful" Democratic Transition in Postsocialist Serbia,' *Slavic Review* 69(1) (2010): 41–64.

³ Jelena Subotić, *Hijacked Justice: Dealing with the Past in the Balkans* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2009); Olivera Simić and Zala Volčič, eds., *Transitional Justice and Civil Society in the Balkans* (New York: Springer, 2013).

⁴ Arnaud Kurze, 'Democratizing Justice in the Post-Conflict Balkans: The Dilemma of Domestic Human Rights Activists,' *CEU Political Science Journal* 7(3) (2012): 243–268.

engagement is to fight against impunity and oblivion. They are the product of a global spillover effect of international human rights practices in combination with the work of domestic human rights advocates.⁵ Yet, their methods diverge from mainstream advocacy work. Rather than courting political institutions in order to push for reform at the state level, these young activists use performance-based campaigns to disseminate their ideas at the community level. However, in a Brechtian sense, performances pursue the goal of disrupting political and systemic boundaries such as class and gender.⁶ Consequently, the combination of elements from the art world and from the field of human rights advocacy in their performances raises compelling questions: Why has performance art emerged as an advocacy strategy among youth activists in the postconflict context of the Balkans? Who exactly are the youth involved in this form of collective action? Is this phenomenon limited to youth activists in the region? What impact do their actions have on postconflict and transition processes in the former Yugoslavia?

Relying on social movement theory and performance studies, I analyze over two-dozen in-depth interviews with youth activist leaders across the former Yugoslavia. I focus on human rights-based organizations with advocacy campaigns that deal with the past, such as the regional organization Youth Initiative for Human Rights (YIHR) and its partner organization *Nisma Ime*, in order to discuss a selection of performance-based campaigns. Supplementary data were collected via an online prosopographic analysis, studying common characteristics of youth activists by aggregating data on their private and professional lives. I underline that the emergence of transitional justice youth activism in the Balkans cannot be compared to the sweeping impact of earlier youth movement mobilizations in the regions that triggered significant

⁵ Personal interview, Mario Mažić, Youth Initiative for Human Rights director, Zagreb, Croatia, 17 September 2014; personal interview, Vesna Teršelić, Documenta director, Zagreb, Croatia, 6 May 2011.

⁶ Elin Diamond, ed., *Performance and Cultural Politics* (London: Routledge, 2013).

institutional reform, such as the case of the *Otpor* (resistance) movement in Serbia.⁷ However, I explain why their performative acts, including temporary street exhibits and interactive installations in public spaces, are distinct from the mainstream practices of established human rights organizations in the postconflict Balkans. I also argue that their performance activism has fuelled the creation of new deliberative spaces to contest the culture of impunity and challenge the politics of memory in the former Yugoslavia.

I start by situating this work within a body of interdisciplinary literature, arguing for a theoretical framework that draws from social movement theory and performance studies to understand the link between youth advocacy and performance activism within the context of transitional justice studies in the former Yugoslavia and beyond. I also discuss the role of social media for transitional justice practices. I then describe the qualitative mixed methods used for the research, with a particular focus on explaining the value of online prosopography to analyze common characteristics of these emerging youth activist groups. Thereafter I discuss the changing nature of the transitional justice activism of a new generation of human rights advocates, and portray a selection of campaigns that rely on performative activism, illustrating the different techniques and conditions in each case. I then show how performance activism created a new deliberative space to deal with the past in postconflict Balkan societies. As activists' efforts go beyond mere deliberation, I define these spaces as so-called *strategic confrontation spaces* and explain the importance and challenges of this trend. In concluding, I point to potential research avenues to apply the findings to other global postconflict contexts.

⁷ See, e.g., Théodora Vetta, "Democracy Building" in Serbia: The NGO Effect,' *Southeastern Europe* 33(1) (2009): 26–47.

<A>UNDERSTANDING THE LINK BETWEEN YOUTH, PERFORMANCE ACTIVISM AND TRANSITIONAL JUSTICE

Over the past few decades, literature on how best to deal with past mass atrocities and human rights violations in postconflict and postauthoritarian contexts has flourished.⁸ More recent transitional justice scholarship on the former Yugoslavia has also provided excellent insights into the politics of justice, but studies that examine state–society relations are underdeveloped.⁹ Some authors have addressed this void, focusing on issues regarding civil society actors across the Balkans.¹⁰ The academic debate on the neocolonial role of so-called global ‘transitional justice entrepreneurs’ – more precisely, the problems associated with international nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) that implement generic cookie-cutter postconflict and postauthoritarian justice measures in local contexts – has also resonated in studies on southeast Europe.¹¹ Anna di Lellio and Caitlin McCurn’s work on socially engineered grassroots movements in Kosovo, for instance, provides empirical evidence of this problem in the context of postwar Kosovar society.¹² In addition, scholarship on political tensions in early 2014, also referred to as the Bosnian Spring,

⁸ For an institutional approach, see, Guillermo O’Donnell and Philippe C. Schmitter, *Transitions from Authoritarian Rule: Tentative Conclusions about Uncertain Democracies* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986); Samuel P. Huntington, *The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1993). For a historical and legal perspective, see, Ruti Teitel, *Transitional Justice* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000); Jon Elster, *Closing the Books: Transitional Justice in Historical Perspective* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004). For scholarship that goes beyond the truth versus justice debate, including a bottom-up perspective, see, Naomi Roht-Arriaza and Javier Mariezcurrena, eds., *Transitional Justice in the Twenty-First Century: Beyond Truth Versus Justice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006); Nicola Palmer, Phil Clark and Danielle Granville, *Critical Perspectives in Transitional Justice* (Cambridge: Intersentia, 2012).

⁹ Subotić, supra n 3; Viktor Peskin, *International Justice in Rwanda and the Balkans: Virtual Trials and the Struggle for State Cooperation* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008); Christopher Lamont, *International Criminal Justice and the Politics of Compliance* (Farnham: Ashgate Publishing, 2010).

¹⁰ Simić and Volčič, supra n 3.

¹¹ Tshupo Madlingozi, ‘On Transitional Justice Entrepreneurs and the Production of Victims,’ *Journal of Human Rights Practice* 2(2) (2010): 208–228.

¹² Anna di Lellio and Caitlin McCurn, ‘Engineering Grassroots Transitional Justice in the Balkans: The Case of Kosovo,’ *East European Politics and Societies* 27(1) (2013): 129–148.

which resulted in violent protests across Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH), have fuelled discussions on transitions, institution building and new forms of political participation.¹³ While demonstrating youth initially caught the media's attention, the focus swiftly shifted to cases of police brutality recorded by human rights organizations.¹⁴

While the 2014 demonstrations emphasized the growing role of youth activism across the region, civic engagement faces an uphill battle against established social patterns. Youth show little interest in participating in political activism, and male youth often only join sport associations such as football clubs.¹⁵ These clubs remain bastions of nationalist ideology and hegemonic male stereotyping and are part of a cultural sphere, including the musical phenomenon of 'turbo folk,'¹⁶ that challenges regional rapprochement and cements ethnic cleavages.¹⁷ However, efforts to create a regional football league¹⁸ and local initiatives that use sports as a means to bring together divided, postconflict societies illustrate a slow, visible evolution in the Balkans.¹⁹ Until recently, the dominant transitional justice discourse in the postconflict period in the former Yugoslavia was that of established human rights advocacy networks, governments across the region

¹³ Damir Arsenijević, *Unbriable Bosnia and Herzegovina: The Fight for the Commons* (Baden-Baden: Nomos Verlagsgesellschaft, 2015).

¹⁴ Human Rights Watch, 'Bosnia and Herzegovina: Investigate Police Violence against Protesters,' 21 February 2014, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2014/02/21/bosnia-and-herzegovina-investigate-police-violence-against-protesters> (accessed 18 May 2016).

¹⁵ Tamara Nikolić, 'Reviews on Youth Policies and Youth Work in the Countries of South East Europe, Eastern Europe and Caucasus – Serbia,' Council of Europe, April 2011, http://pjp-eu.coe.int/documents/1017981/3087112/Reviews_on_youth_policies_SEE_EECA_Serbia_2011.pdf/2978f717-0adb-4170-b79e-d1765251dcd8 (accessed 18 May 2016).

¹⁶ Turbo folk is a music genre that originated in Serbia in the late 1980s. It could be described as urbanized folklore music using fast beats and traditional music. It is popular across the Balkan region and songs are known for their populist messages.

¹⁷ Shay Wood, 'Football after Yugoslavia: Conflict, Reconciliation and the Regional Football League Debate,' *Sport in Society* 16(8) (2013): 1077–1090; Rory Archer, 'Assessing Turbofolk Controversies: Popular Music between the Nation and the Balkans,' *Southeastern Europe* 36(2) (2012): 178–207; Jamie Munn, 'The Hegemonic Male and Kosovar Nationalism, 2000–2005,' *Men and Masculinities* 10(4) (2008): 440–456.

¹⁸ Wood, *supra* n 17.

¹⁹ Anders Levinsen, '13. Inter-Ethnic Football in the Balkans: Reconciliation and Diversity,' *Sport, Ethics and Philosophy* 3(3) (2009): 346–359.

and international organizations. Strategies to deal with the atrocities committed during the wars in the 1990s ranged from retributive measures to restorative initiatives, some of which included a cross-regional perspective. It is against this contextual backdrop and more traditional transitional justice mechanisms that this article centres on new, emerging forms of initiatives promoted by youth to deal with the past.

Research on the role and impact of youth activism in transitional justice contexts is relatively new. Earlier research, for instance, concentrates more on mobilization and political change and is less preoccupied with issues associated with postconflict and postauthoritarian justice. By the mid-1990s, for example, Serbian youth organized resistance against the authoritarian regime led by Slobodan Milošević, forming a movement called *Otpor*. A few studies discuss the institutionalization and the practices of the movement, which ousted the dictator from power, mainly examining the ability to mobilize civil society to foster the collapse of an unjust regime.²⁰ Their performance-based strategies, which combined humour, satire and theatrical staging of protest, have been less theorized about. While the movement at first started particularly within student circles, the nonviolent strategy and theatrical performances eventually drew more risk-averse supporters. In February 2000, *Otpor* activists organized a staged meeting to mock the Serbian Socialist Party's annual congress in order to redefine itself as a broad civic movement rather than a youth movement.²¹

The case of youth as a catalyst to fuel broad-sweeping change is an excellent opportunity to ponder a definition of the social actor in these processes. I draw on a concept of youth that goes beyond the legal

²⁰ See, Oskar Gruenwald, 'Belgrade Student Demonstrations, 1996–97: Rebuilding Civil Society in Yugoslavia,' *Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies* 13(1/2) (2001): 155–174; Sharon L. Wolchik and Valerie Bunce, 'Youth and Electoral Revolutions in Slovakia, Serbia, and Georgia,' *SAIS Review of International Affairs* 26(2) (2006): 55–65.

²¹ Olena Nikolayenko, 'Origins of the Movement's Strategy: The Case of the Serbian Youth Movement Otpor,' *International Political Science Review* 34(2) (2013): 140–158.

notion of adulthood, which defines youth as minors below a certain age.²² Instead, I embrace a more culturally inspired model that describes youth as an experience.²³ More precisely, I focus on youth as a second generation that has been exposed to past violence, but that was not directly implicated in the conflicts. These youth range from their early 20s to mid-30s. Moreover, current studies and reports analyze postconflict youth issues from a normative perspective, often suggesting best practices and policy strategies on *how* to help traumatized youth deal with the past.²⁴ Nonetheless, little is known about the advocacy practices of bottom-up youth activism to confront past wrongdoings across the former Yugoslavia. Focusing on a wide range of youth actors in their 20s and 30s, I analyze the emergence of transitional justice practices that occur in parallel to the official steps put in place. In particular, I discuss the role of art and the impact of social movements to address human rights abuses. Although the Occupy-inspired movements and the uprisings in the Arab world have further brought performance activism and the power of youth into mainstream social movement debates – as highlighted in a culmination of protest and performances in Gezi Park in Istanbul in 2013²⁵ – the work of YIHR in the Balkans dates back to 2008, long before the Arab Spring revolts.²⁶ YIHR is a regional NGO network with offices in several countries of the former Yugoslavia, including BiH, Croatia, Serbia and Kosovo. Contrary to the activities of protestors in Arab Spring countries, which are centred on putting an end to authoritarianism, YIHR's agenda is a continuation of the work started by youth at an earlier time when protestors called for political change. Thus, they operate in a postconflict

²² In many societies around the world, this is 18.

²³ Andy Furlong, *Youth Studies: An Introduction* (New York: Routledge, 2013).

²⁴ See, Pia Peeters, *Youth Employment in Sierra Leone: Sustainable Livelihood Opportunities in a Post-Conflict Setting* (Washington, DC: World Bank, 2009); Robert Muggah, ed., *Security and Post-Conflict Reconstruction: Dealing with Fighters in the Aftermath of War* (London: Routledge, 2008); Kareena McAloney, Patrick McCrystal, Andrew Percy and Claire McCartan, 'Damaged Youth: Prevalence of Community Violence Exposure and Implications for Adolescent Well-Being in Post-Conflict Northern Ireland,' *Journal of Community Psychology* 37(5) (2009): 635–648.

²⁵ See, Arzu Öztürkmen, 'The Park, the Penguin, and the Gas: Performance in Progress in Gezi Park,' *TDR/The Drama Review* 58(3) (2014): 39–68.

²⁶ Personal interview, Mario Mažić, YIHR director, Zagreb, Croatia, 17 September 2014.

and postauthoritarian context and are less concerned about regime change, aiming rather for structural transformation to deal with past human rights violations at a more systemic and societal level.

The pursuit of these goals thus differs greatly from some of the objectives laid out by more conventional measures implemented after mass atrocities and the fall of repressive and dictatorial regimes. Domestic and international war crimes trials, for instance, serve the purpose of establishing accountability and an 'aura of fairness,' as Martha Minow describes it.²⁷ While retributive justice has other cathartic effects on a traumatized society, 'the central purpose of criminal prosecution remains the deterrence of and retribution for serious wrongdoings.'²⁸ Grounded in the rule of law, trials are a warning to avoid future atrocities, but they also provide closure to an episode of injustice. Yet, the politics of justice, resulting in enormous caseloads that cannot be processed timeously and the conundrum of selecting symbolic and significant cases to advance criminal law, has left victims' groups with a sense of disempowerment and disenfranchisement. Truth commissions, as part of restorative justice practices, are also problematic in spite of promising ideals to serve those most affected by trauma. Some of the major pitfalls are time and resource constraints, as well as the challenges of forming a representative body of commissioners for hearings during the postconflict and postauthoritarian transition.²⁹ Due to these unanswered questions about the process of dealing with the past, youth activism emerged as a response seeking alternative forms of addressing apparent injustices. The modus operandi of youth-led collective action did not aim at closing the books. Instead, student leaders were advocating for public debate, which would engage society in confronting the issues directly and at the local level. While this study focuses on performance-related strategies staged by

²⁷ Martha Minow, *Between Vengeance and Forgiveness: Facing History after Genocide and Mass Violence* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1998), 50.

²⁸ Mark Osiel, *Mass Atrocity, Collective Memory, and the Law* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 1997), 293.

²⁹ Minow, *supra* n 27.

organizations such as YIHR, the advocacy portfolio of these groups also relies on classic activism tools, including awareness-raising campaigns, workshops and educational exchange programmes.³⁰

Early performance-based collective action staged by *Otpor* bore elementary traits of transitional justice practices. As a case in point, *Otpor* organized a live rock concert on New Year's eve in 1999. It ended with a speech by the organizers commemorating war victims, supported by a slideshow with war-themed images on a huge open-air movie screen when the clock struck midnight.³¹ Large-scale performative events have a discursive role when dealing with trauma and violence, as illustrated in recent work on Moroccan music festivals to address the consequences of terrorism.³² In addition, after the fall of Milošević, *Otpor* leaders formed an organization called the Centre for Applied Nonviolent Action and Strategies, headed by activist Srđa Popović, with the objective of helping activists around the world to spark democratic processes. The Centre was also instrumental in training many of the revolutionary activists in Egypt and can be traced back to as early as the April 6 Youth Movement in 2005.³³ The spillover effect of methods including performance activism therefore finds its origins in the Balkans, which makes this case study of particular significance in understanding the trajectory of this form of youth activism.

<A>THE RISE OF SOCIAL MEDIA AND ITS IMPACT ON POSTCONFLICT JUSTICE YOUTH ACTIVISM

In order to address the wrongdoings of the past, youth activists engage on two fronts: online and on site. While the former is a virtual space that can connect users across borders, the latter is geographically

³⁰ See, e.g., the reconciliation programme of YIHR in Croatia, <http://yihhr.hr/hr/programi/program-pomirenja/> (accessed 18 May 2016).

³¹ Steve York, *Bringing down a Dictator*, A Force More Powerful Films, US, 2001.

³² Moulay Driss El Maarouf, 'Local Arts Versus Global Terrorism: The Manifestation of Trauma and Modes of Reconciliation in Moroccan Music Festivals,' in *Art and Trauma in Africa: Representations of Reconciliation in Music, Visual Arts, Literature and Film*, ed. Lizelle Bisschoff and Stefanie van de Peer (London: I.B. Tauris, 2013).

³³ Sheryl Gay Stolberg, David Kirkpatrick and Andrew Lehren, 'Shy U.S. Intellectual Created Playbook Used in a Revolution,' *New York Times*, 17 February 2011.

grounded and often bound to a specific location. Yet, both spaces intersect, transforming the real world and the Internet into spaces in which social actors can engage and raise their voices. Rather than examining institutional regime change, this research focuses on the processes of creating deliberative spaces, that is, providing areas for citizens to actively participate in the formation of ideas and policy matters. Focusing on the concept of active participation, Faranak Miraftab and Shana Wills coined the term 'invited spaces' to underline how state institutions provide opportunities for civil society to participate actively in certain problem areas.³⁴ In the case of the former Yugoslavia, however, governments only provide very limited opportunities to participate in broader deliberation on war crimes issues within society. Civil society's struggle to create alternative spaces to deal with the past is described in detail by a number of authors in their work on grassroots activities in transitional justice in the Balkans.³⁵

Although classic cases of past collective actions to deal with human rights violations also included performative elements, they were less about deliberation than about resistance. The protests by the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo, for instance, demonstrate their fight for their rights to uncover the truth, forcing the government to disclose information about their sons and loved ones who disappeared under the military junta in Argentina between 1976 and 1983.³⁶ Protest marches by the Women in Black in Belgrade in the 1990s to remember the Bosnian victims of the 1995 Srebrenica massacre also highlight militant protestors' resistance against the Milošević regime.³⁷ The emergence of social media and the incremental democratic consolidation in states across the Balkans have nonetheless altered the space in which youth activists

³⁴ Faranak Miraftab and Shana Wills, 'Insurgency and Spaces of Active Citizenship: The Story of Western Cape Anti-Eviction Campaign in South Africa,' *Journal of Planning Education and Research* 25(2) (2005): 200.

³⁵ Simić and Volčič, supra n 3.

³⁶ Marysa Navarro, 'The Personal Is Political: Las Madres de Plaza de Mayo,' in *Power and Popular Protest: Latin American Social Movements*, ed. Susan Eckstein (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2001).

³⁷ Orli Fridman, 'Alternative Voices in Public Urban Spaces: Serbia's Women in Black,' *Ethnologia Balkanica* 10 (2006): 291–303.

engage and account for past abuses. In spite of the capacity of so-called ‘liberation technology’ – a powerful mix of mobile technology, the Internet and social media – to ‘expose wrongdoing’ and ‘mobilize protest,’³⁸ younger generations of activists have taken ownership of the virtual space, less with the goal of actively resisting and fighting state authority but instead to reveal facts about the past in order to create a shared collective memory of the Yugoslav conflict.³⁹ The theatrical and playful engaging of citizens in public spaces and in their daily routines has become a key strategy in this context.⁴⁰

If these youth actions were aimed at filling the deliberation void, some fundamental questions can be raised: Why did youth activists decide to embrace especially this new way of carrying out advocacy projects compared to the strategies of the older generation of human rights defenders? Why, despite the modest societal response, does the work of youth activists nonetheless play a fundamental role in the larger public transitional justice debate in the former Yugoslavia? In order to find answers to these questions, this study examines several campaigns and explores why advocates chose the actions they did to respond to questions about truth, justice and memory.

Early sociological research on collective memory found that the creation of a commonly shared history and identity of the past is fuelled by both small and large groups, particularly as narratives emerge and are shared and passed on.⁴¹ More recently, scholars have pointed to the reciprocal relationship between law and memory and the role of trials in creating a collective image of past mass atrocities.⁴² While the initial

³⁸ Larry Diamond, ‘Liberation Technology,’ *Journal of Democracy* 21(3) (2010): 70.

³⁹ Personal interview, Mario Mažić, YIHR director, Zagreb, Croatia, 17 September 2014.

⁴⁰ Tony Perucci, ‘What the Fuck Is That? The Poetics of Ruptural Performance,’ *Liminalities: A Journal of Performance Studies* 5(3) (2009): 1–18.

⁴¹ Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, ed. and trans. Lewis A. Coser (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1992).

⁴² Joachim Savelsberg and Ryan D. King, ‘Law and Collective Memory,’ *Annual Review of Law and Social Science* 3 (2007): 189–211.

impact of court trials in establishing common ground for postconflict societies was estimated to have a powerful impact, the experience on the ground quickly proved this expectation wrong.⁴³ With the usefulness of court archives and abundant evidentiary documents being criticized, other forms of memory building have become the focus of attention, including more performative elements. Ironically, these elements can be found in the courtroom after all. Some researchers suggest that the 'performative elements of testimony, including silences, pauses and emotional outbursts during trials, constitute the archive itself, for they communicate not only fact but also meaning.'⁴⁴ Against the backdrop of memory studies that contest conventional notions of what kind of narrative element can be used to create historical narratives, this article analyzes different performance-based campaigns across the former Yugoslavia and discusses to what extent these practices contribute to establishing collective memories of the past and situating these memories in space and time.

<A>METHODOLOGY

This study draws on over two dozen in-depth interviews with youth activist leaders across the former Yugoslavia. The selection centred on human rights advocates, who often focus their work on transitional justice activities. The data from the interviews were collected systematically, using snowball sampling. To assure trust, existing study subjects recruited future subjects from their acquaintances and professional networks. The study nonetheless aimed at maintaining a gender balance and collecting data from participants engaged in countries across the region. The design choice was made according to Chaim Noy's findings, which illustrate that snowball sampling helps in the investigation of social knowledge from particular

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ See, Marianne Hirsch and Leo Spitzer in Pilar Riaño-Alcalá and Erin Baines, 'The Archive in the Witness: Documentation in Settings of Chronic Insecurity,' *International Journal of Transitional Justice* 5(3) (2011): 413.

sociopolitical groups' organic social networks and social dynamics.⁴⁵ Moreover, participants were interviewed in their capacity as public figures and as the representatives of their organizations, and were asked for their informed consent prior to the interview. The study also borrows concepts from prosopographic research, which consists of investigating the common characteristics of a sociopolitical group by means of a collective study of their lives using multiple career-line analysis.⁴⁶ The online prosopography employed for this research consisted of studying the public profiles and activities of human rights activists in social media such as Twitter and Facebook. In this context, a seminar was held at New York University to educate researchers on ethical considerations regarding online research, as guidelines for research ethics applied to web-based research often remain less developed than for traditional research studies.⁴⁷ In addition, the research relied on content analysis, including official documents, policy briefs, news articles and online information from institutional websites.

Although some of the preliminary interviews were conducted during fieldwork as part of a larger project, the bulk of the data were collected online using Skype video calls. At the beginning of the project, I was sceptical as to whether the methodological choice of online interviews would be conducive to capturing the thick data that is generally gathered during extensive ethnographic fieldwork based on narrative interviews and participatory observations. However, after a few completed interviews with a variety of subjects from across the region, it became clear that the virtual online 'field' was less of an obstacle for the data-collection process than expected. In fact, in the course of the research project it contributed to a better

⁴⁵ Chaim Noy, 'Sampling Knowledge: The Hermeneutics of Snowball Sampling in Qualitative Research,' *International Journal of Social Research Methodology* 11(4) (2008): 327–344.

⁴⁶ Thomas F. Carney, 'Prosopography: Payoffs and Pitfalls,' *Phoenix* 27(2) (1973): 156–179.

⁴⁷ The workshop was held by the University Committee on Activities Involving Human Subjects on 23 October 2014 at the New York campus. The author was part of a group discussing ethical conduct in online-based research with other participants. The deliberative session concluded that information available in the public domain, such as institutional webpages or portals serving as a representation of organizational websites, do not require any institutional review board approval.

understanding of the youth activism. I noticed, for instance, that the subjects were immersed in a web of social media online and all of them were at ease with using Internet technology as an indispensable communication tool. Skype, Facebook and Twitter thus turned into essential analytical tools for this project. While I was used to participatory observation from past research projects, I was unable to directly apply these methods in the traditional sense to this particular study. Nonetheless, I was able to create a continuous information flow by communicating regularly over Skype and Facebook with my research subjects. Instead of carrying out only one-hour interview sessions, I established a rapport with geographically remote subjects by holding several short and long online conversations with my interlocutors, thus drawing on my ethnographic fieldwork experience. Over time, the Internet became the gate to understanding the lives of these young activists, despite the physical distance.

By listening to the interviewees' narratives during the data-analysis process, I was able to reconstruct recurring, common patterns for many of my research subjects. For example, some of the subjects had experienced war crimes and lost family members, which is a strong explanatory variable for their engagement in postconflict justice activism. Yet, the majority of transcribed accounts showed that they were also strongly influenced by workshops, lectures and direct exposure to 'first-generation' human rights activists.⁴⁸ Their professional trajectories thus coincide with the spillover effect of a global human rights discourse.⁴⁹ By combining narrative interview methods and prosopographic analysis conducted online, I was able to create a thick layer of data to not only analyze the emergence of a new generation of transitional justice actors, but also trace and examine their current activism patterns. In fact, the strength of a qualitative mixed-method approach is that scholars can use their 'theoretical resources' to analyze a small set of data

⁴⁸ They include in particular peace activists from the 1990s who are currently involved in advocacy work focusing primarily on war crimes and accountability issues. Personal interview, Vesna Teršelić, Zagreb, Croatia, 6 May 2011.

⁴⁹ See also, Ellen Lutz and Kathryn Sikkink, 'The Justice Cascade: The Evolution and Impact of Foreign Human Rights Trials in Latin America,' *Chicago Journal of International Law* 2(1) (2001): 1–34.

in which context and change are crucial; to underline that coding plays a less important role, as data are dynamic and subject to change; and to 'show how the (theoretically defined) elements we have identified are assembled or mutually laminated.'⁵⁰ Unsurprisingly, this mixed-methods approach was the result of conceptualizing the research question based on an interdisciplinary theoretical framework.

<A>THE METAMORPHOSIS OF ACTIVISM: TRANSITIONAL JUSTICE 2.0

The recent trajectory of transitional justice youth activism across the region is different from restorative justice practices pursued by established human rights activists, such as members of the regional fact-seeking initiative Coalition for RECOM. In the past few years, the latter made numerous attempts at convincing governments to provide political and institutional support at the state level for their cause.⁵¹ In this context, however, several leaders of participating NGOs, including the Croatian and Serbian organizations Documenta Centre for Dealing with the Past and the Humanitarian Law Centre, reported that the success of their efforts was slow and that the bulk of their work to persuade a large number of the political establishment to support their cause was still ahead of them.⁵² The new generation of activists was nonetheless the result of collaborative efforts by human rights organizations, including the Helsinki Committee and Documenta, which 'helped revive a former youth section that existed within the Helsinki Committee before.'⁵³ In spite of youth activists' close ties with the established, older generation of human rights advocates – which is also characterized by senior-level activists playing a mentorship role – many of

⁵⁰ David Silverman, 'Analyzing Talk and Text,' in *Handbook of Qualitative Research*, ed. Norman K. Denzin and Yvonna S. Lincoln (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2000), 828.

⁵¹ Di Lellio and McCurn, *supra* n 12. See also, Jelena Subotić, 'Diverging Paths in the Western Balkans,' *Current History* 112(752) (2013): 107–113.

⁵² Personal interview, Vesna Teršelić, Zagreb, Croatia, 6 May 2011; personal interview, Nataša Kandić, Humanitarian Law Center director, Belgrade, Serbia, 18 May 2011.

⁵³ Personal interview, Ivan Novosel, YIHR programme coordinator, Zagreb, Croatia, 3 March 2013.

the youth-initiated projects prioritize awareness-raising campaigns over direct institutional change.⁵⁴ A key objective of the regional fact-finding initiative, for instance, consisted of urging political leaders across the former Yugoslavia to pass legislation in favour of a transnational truth commission.⁵⁵ As a large part of the work of human rights youth organizations focuses on changing public perceptions in postconflict societies, youth leaders are not necessarily required to court local and national governments to implement their objectives.⁵⁶ As a result, their activities contrast fundamentally from earlier activism that tapped into a repertoire of more conventional social movement activities, such as gatherings and street protest.⁵⁷

A few recent examples illustrate this shift in advocacy strategies. The Croatian chapter of YIHR, for instance, built a temporary installation in Zagreb on Tuđman Square. It consisted of white flashcards with the names of war victims on them hanging from a net spun between park trees.⁵⁸ Additional events organized by YIHR Kosovo and *Nisma Ime* in the city centre of the capital, Pristina, included an enormous circle filled with candles, accompanied by a live solo violin performance, in 2013 and a long line of floating coat hangers in 2012.⁵⁹ The candles were inside paper bags, which were placed on the main square. Each bag had a question mark on one side and a large fingerprint on the other to honour and remember the missing. For the coat-hanger campaign, a piece of white cloth with a large black question mark printed on it

⁵⁴ Personal interview, Mario Mažić, YIHR director, Zagreb, Croatia, 17 September 2014.

⁵⁵ Personal interview, Vesna Teršelić, Zagreb, Croatia, 6 May 2011; personal interview, Nataša Kandić, Belgrade, Serbia, 18 May 2011.

⁵⁶ See, e.g., the organization of the seventh regional forum on transitional justice by first-generation Balkan NGOs, including the Humanitarian Law Center and Documenta, in November 2014. Sven Milekic, 'Regional Truth Commission One Step Closer to Establishment,' *Balkan Insight*, 18 November 2014, <http://www.balkaninsight.com/en/article/transitional-justice-forum-opens-painful-topics> (accessed 18 May 2016).

⁵⁷ See, e.g., 'Tuzla: Peaceful Protests of "Women of Srebrenica",' *Sarajevo Times*, 11 August 2014, <http://www.sarajevotimes.com/tuzla-peaceful-protests-women-srebrenica/> (accessed 18 May 2016).

⁵⁸ For photos of the installation, see, <https://www.facebook.com/media/set/?set=a.457672924271768.98191.145459252159805&type=3> (accessed 18 May 2016).

⁵⁹ For a photographic documentation of these events, see, https://www.facebook.com/nisma.ime/photos_stream (accessed 18 May 2016).

was attached to each hanger. All the hangers dangled off a chicken-wire fence that was installed on the sidewalk along the Mother Teresa Boulevard, intentionally hampering the flow of pedestrians and inciting them to engage with the installation.

A prosopographic analysis of the online profiles and social media of interviewees and their network reveals that the organizers behind these events are cosmopolitan, urban nomads, travelling across the region and beyond to stage performative events and organize meetings to foster ties and collaboration between different communities with the aim of promoting efforts to deal with the past.⁶⁰ Many of the interviewees grew up in a protected environment in which their parents hid any details about the war from them. 'We were protected from everything that came from outside,' explains a media assistant at YIHR in Belgrade.⁶¹ Despite the difficulties of embarking on trips outside the former Yugoslavia – due to visa requirements, especially when travelling to the US or a country within the European Union – they manage to participate in international conferences and pursue fellowships at prestigious institutions. For instance, Mario Mažić, Darija Marić and Nataša Govedarica, activists from the region interviewed for this study, are former fellows of the Alliance for Historical Dialogue and Accountability programme at Columbia University's Institute for the Study of Human Rights. Equipped with transnational knowledge collected from diverse places, the leaders of this youth advocacy movement constitute a new human rights elite that engages beyond the traditional mould of activism from which they originated. A former member of the YIHR Serbia chapter, for example, defines a key element of addressing the past in the former Yugoslavia:

What's missing is a dialogue. People only respond to tag words, such as Srebrenica and Kosovo, which will immediately put them on guard. It is important to start a dialogue and expose

⁶⁰ Personal interview, Maja Mičić, Belgrade, Serbia, 7 March 2013.

⁶¹ Personal interview, Jasmina Lazović, Belgrade, Serbia, 4 March 2013.

them to the facts. You try to get the whole picture across, as reality isn't black and white. There were victims on all sides, even though you cannot say everyone is equally guilty.⁶²

Although he left the YIHR in Belgrade for a position in the private sector, he still considers himself an activist and supports the initiative in his free time.⁶³ The dialogue he refers to, however, is different from traditional bottom-up activism, such as truth commission efforts or attempts to engage public authorities, typical initiatives generally organized by NGOs, including Documenta in Zagreb and the Humanitarian Law Centre in Belgrade. Instead, the dialogue that members of YIHR engage in is characterized by public exposure of facts about war crimes and human rights violations. It carries an implicit message of confronting historical narratives – often disseminated by state authorities – and questioning them. Two case studies in the following section illustrate this unconventional strategy.

<A>STREET PERFORMANCE ACTIVISM AS ALTERNATIVE POSTCONFLICT JUSTICE ADVOCACY

Recent youth campaigns illustrate how activists use public spaces for performance-based advocacy to trigger broader debates about dealing with the past within society.⁶⁴ A variety of current advocacy work has already been documented on social media sites such as Facebook, Twitter and YouTube. The different forms of performance activism aim not only at directly – often physically – confronting the audiences, but also at integrating them into the performance act.⁶⁵ It is important to note that the various campaigns

⁶² Personal interview, Dušan Lupošina, Belgrade, Serbia, 12 March 2013.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ While some of the activities have led to recognition by state officials, society at large constitutes the principal target group.

⁶⁵ See recent campaigns by YIHR in BiH and Kosovo on Facebook, <https://www.facebook.com/yihr.bih/photos> (accessed 18 May 2016). See also, 'We Still Miss Them!' YouTube video, 5:46, 27 April 2013, <http://youtu.be/m5tJwsTTDY8> (accessed 18 May 2016).

launched by youth activists are performances in the broader sense of the term. As Guillermo Gómez-Peña correctly notes:

When performance-studies scholars refer to 'the performance field,' they often mean something different than what performance artists mean: A much broader field that encompasses all things performative, including anthropology, religious practice, pop culture, and sports and civic events.⁶⁶

The campaigns described below highlight the range of protests that youth staged to address particular war crimes issues. The selected examples are only two of many performance-art-related activities organized by youth activists and are representative of a contemporary phenomenon. Other events include impromptu exhibits, art installations and street theatre performances.⁶⁷ All these events are part of a broader trend that has emerged in recent years and the increasing role of social media in documenting and disseminating these performances has contributed to the growing visibility of this phenomenon.

On 27 April 2011, YIHR Kosovo built a white brick wall on Zahir Pajaziti Square near the city centre of Prishtina. It was the size of a medium-sized open-air movie theatre screen, in honour of the missing persons since the last war in Kosovo at the end of the 1990s.⁶⁸ Youth activists inscribed the names of 1,819 missing persons on the wall and put empty chairs in front of the installation to show that the families of the victims are still waiting for recognition of the fate of their loved ones. The organizers witnessed a collection

⁶⁶ Guillermo Gómez-Peña, *Ethno-Techno: Writings on Performance, Activism, and Pedagogy*, ed. Elaine A. Peña (New York: Routledge, 2005), 21–22.

⁶⁷ See the Facebook photo gallery of the YIHR in Kosovo, <https://www.facebook.com/media/set/?set=a.103040623193580.7190.103033919860917&type=3> (accessed 18 May 2016).

⁶⁸ For a photographic documentation of the event, see, <https://www.facebook.com/media/set/?set=a.213755891987106.68842.174237825938913&type=3> (accessed 18 May 2016).

of reactions after the commemorative piece of art was finished and people curiously explored the names on the wall or specifically sought the names of their family members on the temporary monument:

Our emotions were high when family members were finding the names of their loved ones in the wall. Reactions were different, some stood strong and some shed tears of pain, and some were experiencing some kind of a relief. The improvised wall was turning into commemorative monument. People were astounded when they saw how many names there were. Some of them didn't even know what those names might be, but when they realized they stopped and watched in silence and continued walking emotionally moved.⁶⁹

The installation attracted not only random passers-by but also a number of international officials, who laid roses in commemoration of the missing. These members of the international community were from political institutions such as embassies, and from military organizations such as the North Atlantic Treaty Organization's Kosovo Force.⁷⁰

Yet, some reactions to the installation were critical and hostile, in part because the list activists used to compile the names on the wall was an official document from the International Committee of the Red Cross. Hence, the inclusion of Serbian names in addition to Albanian victims on the wall sparked criticism from various individuals within the Kosovar victim community. Despite activists' efforts to promote an inclusive reconciliatory message, which the piece of art aimed for, the YIHR Kosovo programme coordinator explained that people were angry and 'crossed out Serbian names on the wall with a spray can.'⁷¹ Eventually, the creators of the ad hoc memorial had to take it down due to vandalism and the nonpermanent nature of the hastily built structure.⁷²

⁶⁹ See, YIHR Kosovo website, <http://yih-ks.org/removing-the-wall-of-the-missing-in-kosovo/> (accessed 30 May 2016).

⁷⁰ See, YIHR Kosovo website, <http://yih-ks.org/?s=missing> (accessed 30 May 2016).

⁷¹ Personal interview, Besart Lumi, via Skype, 19 February 2014.

⁷² Ibid.

The second campaign selected for this study focuses on BiH. A few years ago, YIHR BiH launched a campaign called Flowers for Sarajevo Roses to commemorate the beginning of the siege of the city of Sarajevo in April 1992. Sarajevo Roses are the marks mortar shells created in the pavement on impact. Their imprints often resemble the shape of pressed flowers on the ground. Every shell caused lasting, visible scars in many different locations across the city – left after the heavy shelling during the siege. While the physical damage in the streets is still noticeable, not every bomb struck a human being, wounding or killing the person. In cases where the bombs cost human lives, citizens filled the craters with red resin to remember the victims.⁷³

The Flowers for Sarajevo Roses campaign had two specific objectives: preserving commemorative history sites and raising awareness about the disappearance of these spaces due to construction and urban development.⁷⁴ In fact, urban sprawl and the reconstruction of the city incrementally led to the silent disappearance as new layers of brick, cement or asphalt replaced some of the old spaces across the city. To counter this development, activists – equipped with red spray cans, red paint buckets and paintbrushes – set out for these landmarks and gave the often-faded crater holes a facelift with dark red weather-resistant outdoor paint. Public reactions to their initiative were mostly positive, but there were also sceptical voices. While many intrigued pedestrians praised their project, some critics stressed the importance of letting wounds heal. Marking these sites visibly with bright paint would be counterproductive in view of this goal.⁷⁵ Regardless of the criticism, YIHR BiH embraced performance-based advocacy that deliberately aimed at an issue that affects the daily lives of Sarajevans, international workers and tourists that live in the city. Activists directly confronted individuals with a symbolic piece of history in their immediate environment, thus

⁷³ Personal interviews, BiH YIHR leaders, Belgrade, Serbia, and Zagreb, Croatia, 12 March and 25 August 2013.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

actively shaping – and in this particular case reviving – Sarajevo’s collective memory about the siege. Building a life-size brick wall in Kosovo and colouring war-damaged urban spaces in Sarajevo with bright paint constitute performative acts in line with Gómez-Peña’s definition.⁷⁶ The activists’ dedicated brushstrokes – with the aim of resuscitating spaces threatened with oblivion – are thus an example of symbolic gestures that blend the basic craftsmanship of painting and politically motivated actions. Art, such as the act of painting in the Flowers for Sarajevo Roses project, becomes a vector to sustain a collective memory about mass atrocities by instrumentalizing geographic spaces that bear the scars of war and by reintegrating these fading symbols into the daily lives of individuals occupying this space.

<A>GOING BEYOND COMPETITIVE VICTIMHOOD: STRATEGIC CONFRONTATION SPACES

The wider success of this type of advocacy work depends on a variety of factors – such as international support, domestic institutions and the ability to mobilize – but the immediate reactions of individuals engaging with the installations demonstrate the significance of emotions in these situations. As Paul Routledge argues:

Politically, emotions are intimately bound up with power relations and also with relations of affinity, and are a means of initiating action. People become politically active because they feel something profoundly.⁷⁷

Emotions are also key motivating factors in activist circles. Emotional experiences are the reason why many youth activists became involved in human rights advocacy, as Ivan Novosel from YIHR in Croatia, remembers:

⁷⁶ Gómez-Peña, *supra* n 66.

⁷⁷ Paul Routledge, ‘Sensuous Solidarities: Emotion, Politics and Performance in the Clandestine Insurgent Rebel Clown Army,’ *Antipode* 44(2) (2012): 429–430.

When I was in high school, I went to a rhetoric workshop organized by the Ministry of Education and the Faculty of Humanities at the University of Zagreb, where I met a former refugee in Kumrovec,⁷⁸ who was homeless for more than five years. This experience got me to think about what happened in Yugoslavia in the 1990s.⁷⁹

Emotions, however, do not only serve as a mobilizing factor and as a creative force to build a collective identity; they can also hamper transformations. Francesca Polletta and James Jasper – both critical of the concept of collective identity – explain that ‘pre-existing solidarities’ can help forge ‘affective connections one has to members of a group that oblige one to protest along with or on behalf of them.’⁸⁰ The example of established victims groups, such as the Mothers of Srebrenica, illustrates this conundrum of in-group identity, which renders community efforts to address past wrongdoings very difficult. In this case, members of the regional truth commission initiative RECOM struggled to convince potential participants, including the Mothers of Srebrenica, to be part of transnational fact-finding efforts across multiple states in the region.⁸¹ The Mothers’ refusal to participate can be explained by the concept of ‘competitive victimhood,’⁸² whereby social groups compete for recognition of their greater relative victim status because of the moral credentials associated with victimhood.⁸³ While such behaviour stalls reconciliatory efforts, recent work in psychology on BiH underlines the necessity of recognizing different types of victimhood to help transformative processes

⁷⁸ Kumrovec is a small Croatian village close to the Slovenian border.

⁷⁹ Personal interview, Ivan Novosel, Zagreb, Croatia, 3 March 2013.

⁸⁰ Francesca Polletta and James M. Jasper, ‘Collective Identity and Social Movements,’ *Annual Review of Sociology* 27 (2001): 290.

⁸¹ Arnaud Kurze and Iva Vukušić, ‘Afraid to Cry Wolf: Human Rights Activists’ Struggle of Transnational Accountability Efforts in the Balkans,’ in Simić and Volčič, *supra* n 3.

⁸² Masi Noor, Rupert Brown and Garry Prentice, ‘Prospects for Intergroup Reconciliation: Social-Psychological Predictors of Intergroup Forgiveness and Reparation in Northern Ireland and Chile,’ in *The Social Psychology of Intergroup Reconciliation*, ed. Arie Nadler, Thomas Malloy and Jeffrey Fisher (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 102.

⁸³ *Ibid.*

among victims.⁸⁴ It is nonetheless a fine line between hampering and improving relations among different social groups in postconflict Balkan societies, where ethnic fault lines still run deep. As a result, the strategy embraced by members of YIHR consists of recognizing victims on the one hand, but transgressing victim-based identity boundaries on the other, enabling a vision of a more inclusive approach to victimhood. 'Victims are victims,' says Teuta Hoxha from YIHR in Kosovo, and 'I don't see a difference between Albanian and Serbian victims.'⁸⁵ Youth advocacy work in the former Yugoslavia nonetheless bears traits of ruptural performances, an 'interruptive, becoming-event, confrontational, and baffling.'⁸⁶ In many cases, the gap between victim communities that many activists initially attempt to bridge threatens to widen. This issue applies particularly to installations that disclose victim names of minority populations or formerly adversarial ethnic groups during the conflict.

Despite this, the described performance activism is an important catalyst for local populations to directly engage in processes that deal with the past. In performance studies, a performance is defined by the existence of an audience that the performative act is intended for. Paradoxically, installing empty chairs in front of a wall with the names of the missing on it in Kosovo emphasized the absence of an audience. By creating a forced emptiness within the physical boundaries of the installation space, the organizers metaphorically criticized the lack of public support for the issue. The audience that eventually came to see the installation filled this void, thus initiating and actively engaging in a wider public debate. The Kosovo example illustrates how performative acts are subject to different audiences whose role evolves depending

⁸⁴ Goran Basic, 'Forgiveness: Social Significance, Health Impact and Psychological Effects,' in *Victimhood, Forgiveness and Reconciliation: In Stories of Bosnian War Survivors*, ed. Eugene L. Olsen (New York: Nova Science Publishers, 2015).

⁸⁵ Personal interview, Teuta Hoxha, via Skype, 1 March 2013.

⁸⁶ Perucci, supra n 40 at 2.

on structural and situational factors.⁸⁷ The physical area of the installation therefore becomes a public space for deliberation.

Deliberation, in the context of this study, refers to a process of interaction between various subjects, dictated by fixed boundaries. Reminiscent of Jürgen Habermas' work on the creation of the 'public sphere' in 19th-century Europe,⁸⁸ this shared public space provides a specific social group – here victims or victim families – a physical location to engage in a discussion on human rights issues within society. While the debate occurs in direct response to the individual present at the installation, it is also, from a broader perspective, directed at the state. According to Habermas, these spaces were key to fostering relations between state authority and the emerging bourgeoisie. They were contingent on access, and 'a public sphere from which specific groups would be *eo ipso* excluded was less than merely incomplete; it was not a public sphere after all.'⁸⁹ Contrary to Habermasian thought – based on the upper class's historical exclusion from the public sphere of certain social groups, such as the poor, women and slaves – youth activists who initially occupy the public sphere with their installations serve as facilitators for victim groups to enter this deliberative space. By increasing victims' visibility at the state level, advocates break down fixed boundaries – in this case, governments' lingering veil of silence around holistically addressing past mass atrocities in the former Balkans. Yet, breaking down boundaries does not necessarily equal redrawing the boundaries. In other words, the efforts of creating a deliberative space are only the first step towards a dialogue between the state and society.

⁸⁷ Erving Goffman, *Where the Action Is: Three Essays* (London: Penguin, 1969).

⁸⁸ Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, trans. Thomas Burger (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1991).

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 85.

Creating new spaces of deliberation in postconflict settings to deal with human rights violations is crucial. Alex Jeffrey, for instance, posits that transitional justice studies have been absorbed in legalist analysis, focusing on the work of international retributive justice – particularly the effects of the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) – on Balkan societies and thus ignoring larger processes that could help these societies cope with the past.⁹⁰ Although the ICTY created a public outreach office to establish closer ties with victim groups in particular but also with affected societies at large – which Jeffrey labelled ‘invited spaces’ in reference to Miraftab and Wills’ work⁹¹ – the success remained limited, leading to a debate outside of the legal sphere. In Jeffrey’s case study on BiH, NGOs organized a range of workshops, cultural events and seminars to fuel a public discussion on transitional justice in BiH. Borrowing from Miraftab and Wills’ work, he called them ‘invented [spaces] as they demonstrated the ability of these organisations to operate outside the legal process and summon into existence new spaces of deliberation.’⁹² The case of performance activism of youth advocates is yet another example of the concept of invented spaces: social actors create new public spaces for society to confront war crimes issues and human rights violations.

Miraftab and Wills’ definition, however, remains very broad from a conceptual perspective, mainly concerned with recognizing the social phenomenon. Given the particular circumstances of the performance-based advocacy work of youth activists that this research focuses on, it is useful to further define these newly created spaces of deliberation. In fact, activists pursue a specific agenda based on an inclusive vision of victimhood. Despite the existence of different and sometimes competing narratives of victimhood,⁹³ youth

⁹⁰ Alex Jeffrey, ‘The Political Geographies of Transitional Justice,’ *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 36(3) (2011): 344–359.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*; Miraftab and Wills, *supra* n 34.

⁹² Jeffrey, *supra* n 90 at 354.

⁹³ Kurze and Vukušić, *supra* n 81.

activists promote a discourse of addressing all victims in a given area, avoiding marginalization issues despite recurring criticism of the dominant victim discourse in the respective areas. Their performative acts are therefore deliberately and strategically calculated to provoke a public response, even if this means confrontation to draw attention to war-crimes-related topics. Simply labelling these physical locations as deliberative spaces, then, does not capture the motivations behind youth advocates' performative acts. The term 'strategic confrontation spaces' is a more suitable definition to reflect the objectives and the performance activism part of young human rights activists' work, as it succinctly describes the purpose of the new spatiality that can be observed in Balkan postconflict justice practices. The creation and evolution of these new spaces is nevertheless contingent on deeper structural transformations that have taken place over the past decade across the region. Authoritarian regimes survived the Yugoslav conflicts until the 1999 death of Franjo Tuđman, Croatia's head of state, and the fall of Serbia's President Milošević in 2000. Since then, states of the former Yugoslavia have been consolidating their democratic institutions. As Mario Mažić, the director of programmes at YIHR, points out,

Today, we still struggle with the sustainability of democracy and participation and democracy mechanisms are still developing, but there are much more open options for advocacy. This is why civil society focuses on education and advocacy. Initiatives still aim at resistance, but now as one of several approaches, whereas in the 1990s and early 2000s, this was almost the only option for organizations.⁹⁴

Young activists' vision of implementing transitional justice in the postconflict Balkans has evolved from the objectives pursued by earlier generations of human rights activists. Yet, this strategic shift to an inclusive approach to victimhood would not have been possible without contextual changes on the ground,

⁹⁴ Personal interview, Mario Mažić, via Skype, 18 February 2016.

with young activists unleashing the transformative potential with their innovative ideas and daring initiatives. The regional case study of these young human rights advocates is not only an example of individuals and social groups across the former Yugoslavia engaging in performance activism, but is part of a larger global trend that should receive more scholarly attention in the future.

<A>CONCLUSION

This study discussed the growing role of youth activism in postconflict societies across the former Yugoslavia, describing innovative ways in which youth deal with the past, despite often not having first-hand experience of conflict in the region. I illustrated the extent to which youth harness performance activism to go beyond entrenching public perceptions and concepts of rivalrous victimhood. Thus, youth have created new so-called 'confrontation spaces' that serve as deliberative spaces aimed at provoking and engaging the public in postconflict societies. These findings are important as they question existing conceptualizations of human rights activism and push current research to rethink the role and impact of young, engaged actors in transitional justice processes. They also serve as an incentive for additional research into youth activism in different postauthoritarian and postconflict contexts. Despite the Balkan-centric analysis of this article, the research conveys valuable insights that go beyond these geographical boundaries. Applying these findings to other global transitional justice settings could eventually produce insightful comparative research.

As a case in point, the 2011 uprisings in the Middle East that fuelled a wave of social movements, also referred to as the Arab Spring, are recent examples illustrating the importance of youth activism in transitional contexts.⁹⁵ Other regions such as Latin America – and even the US – have also witnessed

⁹⁵ See, Suad Joseph, 'Anthropology of the Future: Arab Youth and the State of the State,' in *Anthropology of the Middle East and North Africa: Into the New Millennium*, ed. Sherine Hafez and Susan Slyomovics (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2013).

increasing youth activism for a variety of reasons.⁹⁶ While the current literature on these topics grapples in large part with the idea of institutional change, the *Otpor* movement was not fit to deal with the scars left by the conflict. This research is therefore crucial to emphasize the significance of studying the dynamic advocacy processes of youth activists who aim to create a culture of remembrance within society rather than overthrowing institutional structures. Although regime change is fundamental for democratization processes, the resurgence of state powers across much of the Middle Eastern region, as well as the widespread culture of impunity across the Balkans, indicate that these issues need to be addressed with alternative ideas and actions.

⁹⁶ Jessica K. Taft, *Rebel Girls: Youth Activism and Social Change across the Americas* (New York: New York University Press, 2011); Cynthia Bejarano, 'Border Rootedness as Transformative Resistance: Youth Overcoming Violence and Inspection in a US–Mexico Border Region,' *Children's Geographies* 8(4) (2010): 391–399.