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# Reminding, Retelling, and Re-Remembering: The Evolution of Staro Sajmište, Its Future, and the Marginalization of the Holocaust in Serbian Public Memory

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**Reminding, Retelling, and Re-Remembering:  
The Evolution of Staro Sajmište, its Future, and the Marginalization of the Holocaust in  
Serbian Public Memory**

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**Abstract**

This research paper examines the evolution of Staro Sajmište, its future and the resultant marginalization of the Holocaust in Serbian public memory. Sajmište was the largest Nazi concentration camp in territory of the Republic of Serbia. After a brief overview the history of the Holocaust and the history of the site, this paper focuses on the political manipulation of Sajmište's memory since the Second World War. The paper divides the evolution of Staro Sajmište in Serbian public memory into four phases: rewritten memory, reduced memory, fabricated memory, and erased memory. Through the analysis of Sajmište's legacy in Serbian public memory, the marginalization of the Holocaust is analyzed. The paper concludes with a presentation of both official and unofficial proposals concerning the site's future status.

## Introduction

The aim of this research paper is to explore the Staro Sajmište's legacy in contemporary Serbian public memory.<sup>1</sup> Sajmište's function has transformed several times during the last seventy-two years. The site began as an international fairground changed into a Nazi concentration camp, then became a housing complex for construction works, then an artist colony, and is now a derelict neighborhood. Its most infamous history occurred during the Second World War, when it functioned as a Nazi concentration camp for Serbian Jewry and then an internment camp for political prisoners.<sup>2</sup> This paper focuses on this period, with added emphasis on its time as a concentration camp for Jews. Despite its historical significance, and its central location in Belgrade, Sajmište is significantly neglected in Serbian public memory. Few know its history and even fewer acknowledge its existence as they pass by the site during their daily commutes to work.

A central part of Sajmište's legacy in Serbian public memory has been the continued marginalization of the Holocaust. For the purposes of this study, it is important to define what it meant by the term marginalization. In Yugoslavia and Serbia, the Holocaust was never and has never been denied as a historical event. Jewish victims have always been included in official counts of the dead. Rather, the Holocaust's uniqueness was denied. It was considered to be "part of the general and horrible tragedy of many countries which fascism tried to enslave or destroy.

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<sup>1</sup> The Sajmište concentration camp is known by several names. The aforementioned phrase is a direct translation from the Serbian term, "Konzentracioni logor Sajmište." The German name, "Semlin Judenlager" is often used when referring to the Jewish concentration camp and "Semlin Anhaltelager" for the internment camp. Semlin is the German name for the neighborhood of Zemun, located near Belgrade. Internationally, it is written without the Serbian diacritic, as Sajmiste. Sajmište itself is a translation of the word 'fairground', referring to the pre-war trade fairground on the same site. In this paper, the Serbian term Sajmište will be used because it was the term used by the interview participants. The choice to use the original orthography is repeated throughout this paper for terms, places, and names for the same reason. The key exception is the use of the term Belgrade for the capital city in place of the native "Beograd" since Belgrade is already widely used in English.

<sup>2</sup> Roma were also interned at Sajmište during its function as a Judenlager. Their suffering at the camp was equally as harsh and suffered identical fates.

It [was] inseparably tied up with the huge horrible sufferings of other Yugoslav peoples.”<sup>3</sup> This phenomenon becomes apparent when examining Sajmište’s legacy in Serbian public memory. Sajmište was the largest concentration camp in Nazi-occupied Serbia, where more than half of Serbian Jewry perished.<sup>4</sup> Yet there is no memorial at Sajmište specifically referencing the camp’s role in the destruction of Serbian Jewry. The fact that the Jews were the only inmates interned at Sajmište as part of a deliberate and systematic genocide is not acknowledged. When Jewish suffering and the Holocaust are recalled in Serbia, it is practically entirely within the context of the Independent State of Croatia and Jasenovac. This paper seeks to explain why this is the case through an analysis of Sajmište’s evolution in Serbian public memory.

Sajmište’s legacy in public memory has been greatly affected by Serbia’s changing political landscape since the end of the Second World War. Over the last sixty-five years, Sajmište has been used for various political means other than memorialization of the camp’s victims. The exact position of Sajmište in Serbian public memory at a given time is determined by the dominant ideology at that period. Whereas during the socialist era, Sajmište’s memory was rewritten to further the concept of “brotherhood and unity,” under Milošević it was fabricated to highlight Serb victimhood during the Second World War and the Yugoslav Wars.<sup>5</sup> By examining the evolution of Sajmište’s legacy in public memory and current memorialization efforts, one can understand how collective memory is formed, modified, and erased in Serbia.

Understanding the evolution of Sajmište’s legacy in Serbian public memory must begin with a historical overview of the Holocaust in Serbia. This is required in order to establish a

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<sup>3</sup> The Federation of Jewish Communities of the Federative People’s Republic of Yugoslavia, *The Crimes of the Fascist Occupants and Their Collaborators Against Jews in Yugoslavia*, Ed. 2., (Jasenovac Research Institute: Belgrade, 2005), xiii.

<sup>4</sup> Christopher R. Browning, “The Final Solution in Serbia: The Semlin Judenlager - A Case Study,” *Yad Vashem Studies* 15 (1983): 85.

<sup>5</sup> Sr an Radovi , “Politics of Space and Memory in Serbia or: How One Learns to Stop Worrying about the Camp and Love the Mall,” Irmgard Coninx Stiftung Conference on Memorials and Museums, 23 October 2009, 5.

context in which the camp operated. Following that, the same must be done for the history of the site itself. This includes its multiple functions since the end of the Second World War. Doing so will demonstrate how the site transformed according to the dominant ideology and political narratives at the time.

## **Methodology**

I conducted the vast majority of the interviews used in this research paper through the semi-structured method. One of the main reasons I employed this method was its ability to extract information which the participant deems important. In other words, by entering the interview with a predetermined topic I was able to listen to what was said and craft impromptu interview questions accordingly. I had a general set of interview questions prepared beforehand that I adjusted according to the specific participant. I used this method over the course of a month with historians, anthropologists, archeologists, architects, museum directors, ethnologists, government officials, students, professors, film directors, and members of the Jewish community. A large portion of my research was formed based on these interviews and discussions.

Aside from interviews, I gathered a significant amount of data from secondary sources including documentary films and written texts. These secondary sources will be discussed in the subsequent section. I also employed personal observations as an additional research method. I made visits to museums, Second World War sites across Belgrade, cemeteries, monuments, and former Jewish neighborhoods. These visits provided me with an insight into the physical manifestation of public memory in Serbia and helped structure certain interviews.

I began the interviewing process by sending an email or calling the participants directly. I informed them of the nature of my project, gave them a short description of myself, and asked if

they were willing to meet with me. Volunteering this information on my end proved to be a very valuable step. By informing the participants of my topic before the interview, I allowed them to collect their thoughts, to develop a general idea of what they were going to say, and to gather any additional resources, such as articles or contact information, that they believed would be helpful. The beginning of each interview started the same, with my asking permission to record the interview and notifying the participants that I would also be taking notes. Then the meeting progressed with the participant detailing their connection with Sajmište and how they originally became involved. After this question, the direction of the interview changed according to the individual participant. I closed each meeting by thanking them for their time, and asked if a second meeting be possible, if necessary. This proved helpful in clarifying any questions that arose after the meeting ended.

I gathered my contacts through two means. The first group of contacts had written articles on Sajmište, the Holocaust in Serbia, or Serbian public memory. For this group of participants, I read their articles or texts beforehand. I based my questions to them off what they wrote and any subsequent extrapolations. The second group of participants were recommended from prior interviewees. I altered their questions according to their professions and specialties.

One very important bias which need to be stated when reading this research paper is the author's self identification as an American Jew who supports the memorialization effort at Sajmište on behalf of the Jewish community.

## **Literature Review**

There does not exist a wide selection of academic literature on the topic of Staro Sajmište in Serbian public memory. The secondary sources used in this study can be divided into three distinct categories. The first are secondary sources regarding the Second World War and the

Holocaust in Serbia. The second, deal specifically with Sajmište. The third focuses on the memory of the Holocaust and Serbian Jewry, and the fourth concerns the politics of memory.

Historical texts on the Second World War and the Holocaust in Serbia and Yugoslavia formed the first phase of the research. This was a necessary step as it provided a clear understanding of terms, dates, places, events, and numbers which enhanced an understanding of this time period. Raul Hilberg's seminal work, *The Destruction of the European Jews*, and his section on Serbia supplied a factual summary of the atrocities committed against Jews in Yugoslavia, Serbia, and in Sajmište. The Federation of Jewish Communities of the Federative People's Republic of Yugoslavia's monograph, *The Crimes of the Fascist Occupants and Their Collaborators Against Jews in Yugoslavia* documented the fate of Yugoslavia's Jewry during the Second World War. The Federation and Hilberg's books were mainly used for quantitative purposes, such as providing facts and figures. Several chapters of *Hitler's New Disorder: The Second World War in Yugoslavia* by Stevan K. Pavlowitch provided a more in-depth look into the Holocaust in Serbia. Pavlowitch's examination of wartime Serbia places the Holocaust in context with greater civilian suffering within the Nazi-occupied state. The Hamburg Institute for Social Research's published paper, entitled *Crimes of the German Wehrmacht: Dimensions of a War of Annihilation, 1941 – 1944*, provided supplemental information on the Second World War in Serbia. Christopher Browning's texts on the Holocaust, including *Ordinary Men: Reserve Police Battalion 101 and the Final Solution in Poland* and *Fateful Months: Essays on the Emergence of the Final Solution* gave more theoretical information on the planning and implementation of the Holocaust in Europe.

Ivo Goldstein's text, "The Jews in Yugoslavia 1918 to 1941: Anti-Semitism and the Struggle for Equality" details the situation of Jews within the interwar Yugoslav society and the rise of anti-Semitism. Olga Manojlovi Pintar's article on "Delusion and Amnesia: Ideology and

Culture in Nedi 's Serbia" provided information on the Kingdom of Yugoslavia's bilateral relationship with Nazi Germany and political environment during Milan Nedi 's reign. Additionally, Emil Kerenji's doctoral thesis, entitled "Jewish Citizens of Socialist Yugoslavia: Politics of Jewish Identity in a Socialist State, 1944-1974," presents the history of Yugoslav Jews during the interwar period as well as during the Holocaust.

The second section of secondary sources came from scholarly articles dealing specifically with Sajmište. Browning's case study of Sajmište, *The Final Solution in Serbia: The Semlin Judenlager - A Case Study*, published in cooperation with the Israeli Holocaust museum, Yad VaShem, supplemented his theoretical works with facts and figures. This article details Sajmište's complete history as a concentration camp, the inner workings of the German leadership at the camp, and the introduction of the gas van to Belgrade.

Jovan Byford large collection of texts regarding Sajmište, its history, and the current status of the site proved invaluable for this research. His website, "*Semlin Judenlager* in Serbian Public Memory" presents a history of Sajmište during the Holocaust and of the Holocaust itself, translated letters by a former inmate, and an overview of the site since the end of the Second World War. In his article entitled "'Shortly Afterwards, We Heard the Sound of the Gas Van': Survivor Testimony and the Writing of History in Socialist Yugoslavia," published in the *History & Memory* journal was very useful. In it, Byford discusses the advent of the gas van as a means of murder, how the "killing device was brought to Belgrade specifically for the purpose of killing [the Jews]" but became appropriated by Tito's government. It was then used to create shared memory of collective suffering under Fascism, and transform Sajmište from a site of Jewish suffering to a site of Partisan suffering furthering the Holocaust's marginalization at the site.<sup>6</sup> In his yet-to-be-published article, "'Half-Recognizing' The Holocaust: Negotiating A Place For the

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<sup>6</sup> Jovan Byford, "'Shortly Afterwards, We Heard the Sound of the Gas Van': Survivor Testimony and the Writing History in Socialist Yugoslavia," *History & Memory* 22 (Spring/Summer 2010): 7.

Destruction of Jews in Serbian Public Memory,” Byford explores “the ways in which a place for the victims of the Holocaust was negotiated within the postwar remembrance of Sajmište.”<sup>7</sup>

Two articles, Sr an Radovi ’s conference speech “Politics of Space and Memory in Serbia or: How One Learns to Stop Worrying about the Camp and Love the Mall” and Mladenka Ivankovi ’s article “The “Sajmište” (Exhibition Grounds) in Semlin, Serbia: The Changing of Memory” deal with Sajmište in contemporary Serbia and the various problems it faces in light of competing narratives. Both articles also discuss the proposals to create a new memorial at the site in the past years, their pitfalls, and the commercial and political aspects of the proposals. Ljiljana Blagojevi ’s conference paper, “Back to the Future of New Belgrade: Functional Past of the Modern City,” addresses the ideological elements of Novi Beograd’s construction. Marta Vukoti Lazar and Jasmina oki ’s article, “Complex History as a Source of Planning Problems: Old Belgrade Fairground,” approaches Sajmište in the context of urban development and planning. They present their understanding of the complex issues at Sajmište and offer several solutions. The Town Planning Institute of Belgrade’s published project, “The Old Belgrade Fairground as the Old New Belgrade Core,” provides another look at the site in public memory and introduces other proposals.

Aside from written texts, B92’s documentary film by Marko Popovi and Sr an Mitrovi , “Sajmište, The History of a Camp” was used as a resource in this research paper. The film includes survivor testimony and images of the modern site. Their film also includes the history of Topovske Šupe and Anhaltelager, which gave additional context to Sajmište’s history as a Jewish concentration camp.

Several articles regarding the memory of the Holocaust and Jews in Serbia provided additional information. Jovan Byford’s article “When I Say ‘The Holocaust’, I Mean

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<sup>7</sup> Jovan Byford, “‘Half-Recognizing’ The Holocaust: Negotiating A Place For the Destruction of Jews in Serbia Public Memory”, Unpublished Manuscript: 4.

‘Jasenovac’: Remembrance of the Holocaust in Contemporary Serbia” introduced the concept of the marginalization of the Holocaust in Serbia outside of Sajmište. His article also discusses the Serbian nationalist appropriation of the Holocaust, the failure of recognizing Sajmište as a place of the Holocaust and how the “victimization of Jews is recalled and commemorated almost exclusively in the context of and in relation to the theme of Serbian suffering and martyrdom.”<sup>8</sup> Emil Kerenji’s conference paper on “The State of the Holocaust Research in Serbia” addresses the history of Holocaust scholarship in Serbia and current trends within that scholarship. David MacDonald’s article, “Globalizing the Holocaust: A Jewish ‘Useable Past’ in Serbian Nationalism,” addresses the issue of the appropriation of the Holocaust and the Jewish trope during the collapse of Yugoslavia in the early 1990s. P. B. Gordiejew’s “Playing with the Jews in the Field of Nations: Symbolic Contests in the Former Yugoslavia” addressed the appropriation of Jews, Jewish symbols, and Jewish suffering during the Holocaust in the former Yugoslavia. This field of research allowed for a broader understanding of why the Holocaust, and more specifically, Sajmište is remembered in a specific way within Serbia.

The final area of secondary sources was a theoretical overview of the politics of memory and its relationship to nationalism and nation building. Emil Kerenji’s doctoral thesis, “Jewish Citizens of Socialist Yugoslavia: Politics of Jewish Identity in a Socialist State, 1944-1974” introduced different conceptions of public memory, as well as important historical facts. John Gillis’s introduction to *Commemorations: The Politics of National Identity* outlined the key theories with regard to the relationship of identity and memory. Many of the concepts from “The Politics of War Memory and Commemoration: Contexts, Structures and Dynamics” by T.G. Ashplant, Graham Dawson, and Michael Roper as well as those from Eviatar Zerubavel’s “Calendars and History: A Comparative Study of the Social Organization of National Memory,”

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<sup>8</sup> Jovan Byford, “‘When I Say ‘The Holocaust,’ I Mean ‘Jasenovac,’” *East European Jewish Affairs* 37 (April 2007): 54.

in *States of Memory: Continuities, Conflicts, and Transformations in National Retrospection*, were applicable in the Serbian context of Second World War commemorations and memory. Finally, the collection of texts from *War and Remembrance in the Twentieth Century* introduced the concept of silence as a unique phenomenon within the field of the politics of memory. These texts served to create an understanding of memory politics and the formation of public memory, which complimented the other three areas.

### **Limitations**

This depth of this study was limited by many factors. To begin, my poor command of Serbian/Croatian/Bosnian prevented me from speaking with individuals who could not or did not wish to communicate through English. I wanted to talk with people familiar with Sajmište and its legacy. These two factors resulted in a small group of subjects. The bulk of my participants were academics that have written on this subject. The language factor also limited my ability to interview many of Belgrade's older generation. They could have provided me with their memories of the Second World War and possibly of Sajmište. I was also unable to speak with any members of the Roma population currently living in Sajmište. Their voices are extremely important when discussing the future of the site. Accordingly, my discussion of Sajmište's future lacks their opinions and input.

Time proved to be another limiting factor for this study. I was given a period of five weeks to conduct interviews, perform a literature review, explore the site, and write this paper. Had I had more time, I believe I could have explored the issues raised in this research paper more deeply, and also could have included more interviews containing different perspectives and opinions. This time frame limited my ability to meet with individuals, as many people who I contacted were busy during these past five weeks and unavailable for interviews. It is also

important to note that I only interviewed people who were in Belgrade; including voices from other areas of Serbia would have added additional depth to this study.

Since I performed my research in Belgrade away from a university library, I was limited in my secondary sources. There were several books that would have been helpful for this study but were not available in Serbia. As a result, the majority of the literature cited in this study comes from scholarly articles or other academic literature available to me electronically.

### **Defining Public Memory**

For this study, it is important to clarify and define the term ‘public memory’. John Bodnar defines public memory as “a body of beliefs and ideas about the past that help a public or society understand both its past, present, and by implication, its future.”<sup>9</sup> This paper operates with the assumption that public memory is interchangeable collective memory. In his doctoral thesis, Emil Kerenji discusses Maurice Halbwachs and Paul Connerton’s views on collective memory:

Maurice Halbwachs ... argued that the formation and transmission of such particular and always selective images of the past cannot be understood outside the social context ... Connerton argues that if we are to continue studying social memory along the lines suggested by Halbwachs, we should focus on communication between individuals through the generations; it is at this site that “social memory” is ultimately formed ... Connerton suggests that processes of social remembrance are situated in, and transmitted through, ritualized social practices.<sup>10</sup>

These arguments have all shaped the conception of public memory that will be discussed throughout this paper.

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<sup>9</sup> John Bodnar, *Remaking America: Public Memory, Commemoration, and Patriotism in the Twentieth Century*, (Princeton: University of Princeton Press, 1992). 15.

<sup>10</sup> Kerenji, “Jewish Citizens of Socialist Yugoslavia,” 10 ff., from Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), and Paul Connerton, *How Societies Remember* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 36-38.

## History of the Holocaust in Serbia

At the Wannsee Conference on 20 January 1942, the leaders of Nazi Germany made the decision to systematically kill the Jews of Europe as part of “the final solution of the Jewish question.”<sup>11</sup> The mass extermination of Serbian Jews began in the fall of 1941, before the official start of the Final Solution. By the spring of 1942, before most extermination camps in Eastern Europe began operation, the vast majority of the Serbian Jewish community had been killed.<sup>12</sup> Nazi-occupied Serbia was the first country to be declared *Judenfrei*, literally translated as free of Jews.<sup>13</sup> This process did not exist in a vacuum; its origins rest in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia with the rise of anti-Semitic movements and legislation, which escalated during the Second World War.<sup>14</sup>

Adolf Hitler’s rise to power in interwar Germany had a great impact on the Kingdom of Yugoslavia. Germany began financing pro-Nazi, fascist, and anti-Semitic organizations in the kingdom. These organizations were comprised mainly of Volksdeutsche, or ethnic Germans, in Vojvodina and future Ustaše in Croatia. Their anti-Semitism was based on Nazi racial-based ideology. However, during the dictatorship of King Alexander, the Yugoslav authorities prevented any serious incidents from occurring. In response to Jewish organizations official complaints, the authorities promised, “the anti-Jewish activities in our state will be stopped and made impossible in the future.”<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Browning, “The Final Solution in Serbia”: 55.

<sup>12</sup> Stevan K. Pavlowitch, *Hitler’s New Disorder: The Second World War in Yugoslavia* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), 70. The official number of Serbian Jews who died is 14,500.

<sup>13</sup> Emil Kerenji. “Jewish Citizens of Socialist Yugoslavia: Politics of Jewish Identity in a Socialist State, 1944-1974,” PhD diss., University of Michigan, 2008, 98.

<sup>14</sup> Yugoslavia was originally founded as the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes in 1918. Both domestically and internationally, the kingdom was known informally as Yugoslavia. In 1929, King Alexander declared a dictatorship and amongst other acts, he officially changed the kingdom’s name to the Kingdom of Yugoslavia. I will use the term Yugoslavia the kingdom throughout this paper.

<sup>15</sup> Ivo Goldstein, “The Jews in Yugoslavia, 1918-1941: Anti-Semitism and the Struggle for Equality,” Public Lecture Series in Jewish Studies at Central European University, 1999-2000, 8.

King Alexander's assassination in Marseilles on 9 October 1934 caused a shift in Yugoslavia's domestic and foreign policy. These policy shifts aligned the country with Nazi Germany and its anti-Semitic ideology.<sup>16</sup> The Prime Minister at the time, Milan Stojadinovi , strengthened bilateral ties between the nations. In parliament Stojadinovi declared himself to be an "enthusiastic supporter of Hitler's policy" and that he "had no enthusiasm for [Jewish] refugees from the Third Reich."<sup>17</sup> During Stojadinović's tenure, the Kingdom of Yugoslavia passed two laws restricting Jewish civil rights. The first banned Jewish owned and co-owned businesses that dealt with foodstuffs. The second placed a quota on Jewish attendance in schools to coincide with the percentage of Jews in the population.<sup>18</sup> These laws violated the Yugoslav constitution by marking Jews as unequal citizens of the kingdom but did not provoke any national protests.<sup>19</sup>

On 6 April 1941, Nazi Germany attacked and invaded the Kingdom of Yugoslavia. The following eleven days proved disastrous for the kingdom. The Axis partitioned Yugoslavia, annexed the borderlands and established pro-Nazi regimes in the remaining areas.<sup>20</sup> Anti-Semitic policies and legislation promulgated in the kingdom intensified under the new puppet regimes. The Germans placed Milan Nedi , a former general and Minister of War, in charge of the Serbian puppet state. In Nedi 's Serbia, Jews were labeled as "unwanted others" and the "archenemies of all nations, all races, all religions, and all cultures."<sup>21</sup>

The Germans began their occupation of Serbia by excommunicating the Jewish community from the rest of Serbian society. Harald Turner, the Chief of the Military

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<sup>16</sup> Olga Manojlovi Pintar, "Delusion and Amnesia: Ideology and Culture in Nedi 's Serbia", Unpublished Manuscript: 4.

<sup>17</sup> Goldstein, "The Jews in Yugoslavia, 1918-1941": 10.

<sup>18</sup> Goldstein, "The Jews in Yugoslavia, 1918-1941": 10, and Manojlovi Pintar, "Delusion and Amnesia," 5.

<sup>19</sup> Manojlovi Pintar, "Delusion and Amnesia": 6.

<sup>20</sup> Pavlowitch, *Hitler's New Disorder*, 21 ff, and Kerenji, "Jewish Citizens of Socialist Yugoslavia": 96.

<sup>21</sup> Manojlovi Pintar, "Delusion and Amnesia": 7.

Administration in Serbia, did so by placing discriminatory measures on the Jewish population. These included the confiscation of private property, mass registrations, an imposition of a curfew, and additional restrictions on businesses.<sup>22</sup> The situation for the Jewish community worsened following the Partisan uprising in the summer of 1941.<sup>23</sup> First, the Jews from the Banat, the northern area of Serbia directly under German control, were deported from their homes to Belgrade. They were subsequently subjected to the same restrictions as the Belgrade Jews. Then, the Nazis and Serbian collaborationist forces rounded up all Jewish males over the age of 14. These Jews were then interned at the Topovske Šupe camp in the Autokomanda neighborhood of Belgrade.

Topovske Šupe was originally built during the interwar period where it functioned as a military barrack for the Royal Yugoslav Army. The Nazis first interned the male Banat Jews at the camp, quickly followed by their Belgrade counterparts. The Serbian collaborationist forces supplied the Germans with the list of Jews according to the Yugoslav census. The German authorities intended Topovske Šupe to only be a transit camp, holding the Jews until they could be transported to the east.<sup>24</sup> The proper infrastructure required in Poland, however, was not yet available and the military government devised an alternative method of solving their “Jewish problem.”<sup>25</sup> Beginning in July 1941, the Nazi and Serbian collaborationist forces began using Jewish hostages from Topovske Šupe in *Geismordpolitik*, or retaliatory executions.<sup>26</sup> The German authorities declared that one hundred civilians would be executed for every German

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<sup>22</sup> Raul Hilberg, *The Destruction of the European Jews*, Vol. 2., (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1985): 683.

<sup>23</sup> The Partisans were the military arm of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia under the command of Marshal Josip Broz Tito.

<sup>24</sup> Hilberg, *The Destruction of the European Jews*, 684.

<sup>25</sup> Jovan Byford, “History of the Holocaust in Serbia,” Semlin Judenlager, Accessed 20 November 2010, <<http://www.semmlin.info/>>.

<sup>26</sup> The official order from Berlin to use Jews as hostages for retaliatory executions did not come to Belgrade until October 1941. The German authorities believed that the invasion of the Soviet Union would trigger uprisings by the Partisans throughout the former Yugoslavia and therefore began ordering the Jewish representative body to send 40 male Jews every week to be executed as early as July 1941. See Jovan Byford, “Semlin Judenlager 1941-1942,” Semlin Judenlager, Accessed 22 November 2010, <<http://www.semmlin.info/>>.

soldier killed and fifty civilians would be executed for every German soldier injured.<sup>27</sup> The Jewish males interned at Topovske Šupe provided an easy source for this new law's casualties. Topovske Šupe's population quickly diminished through this process. By the end of the year when the camp closed, practically all of the Jewish male population in Serbia had been executed.<sup>28</sup>

Banjica, another former Yugoslav army facility, was also used during the Second World War as an internment camp. It began as a military prison for various enemies of the occupation, including communists, royalists, Freemasons, intellectuals, and Jews.<sup>29</sup> These Jews consisted of captured Partisans, their families, and any Jew found hiding from the Gestapo. Their fate mimicked those at Topovske Šupe. Banjica's inmates were executed as retaliations for German deaths and injuries. They were then buried in mass graves in the outskirts of the city. The burial site, Jajinci, contains nearly 80,000 persons killed by the Nazis during the Second World War.<sup>30</sup> It is also the burial site for the Jews killed at Topovske Šupe, Banjica, and those from Staro Sajmište.

### **History of the Staro Sajmište**

Staro Sajmište, literally Old Fairground, was constructed in 1937 as an exhibition complex.<sup>31</sup> It was the first structure to be built across the Sava River from the city center in what was then an unpopulated swamp. The complex was comprised of a central tower and several pavilions, each designated for a specific country or business. Sajmište publicly opened in the fall, and showcased international automobile exhibits, concerts, sports competitions, and fashion

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<sup>27</sup> Hamburg Institute for Social Research, *Crimes of the German Wehrmacht: Dimensions of a War of Annihilation, 1941 – 1944* (Hamburg: Hamburger Edition, 2004), 24.

<sup>28</sup> Byford, "History of the Holocaust in Serbia," <<http://www.semlin.info/>>.

<sup>29</sup> Byford, "Shortly Afterwards, We Heard the Sound of the Gas Van": 7.

<sup>30</sup> Byford, "Shortly Afterwards, We Heard the Sound of the Gas Van": 25.

<sup>31</sup> Radovi , "Politics of Space and Memory in Serbia": 3.

shows. The site quickly became an important meeting point for businessmen across Yugoslavia and its neighboring countries, as well as a population touristic destination for Belgraders.<sup>32</sup>

The German air attack in April 1941 and following the invasion drastically changed the future of the site. After the Jewish male population was virtually destroyed in Topovske Šupe and Banjica, the question of the surviving Jewish population remained. This population consisted of women, children, and the elderly. The Nazi leaders in Belgrade and Berlin discussed several solutions to their 'Jewish question'. Plans included a ghetto within the city borders and a camp at Sremska Mitrovica near Belgrade.<sup>33</sup> These proposals were ultimately scrapped in favor of a concentration camp across the Sava River en route to Zemun, at Sajmište.

The left bank of the Sava River, which contained Sajmište, was officially within the territory of the Independent State of Croatia (NDH). However, the Croatian collaborationist authorities ceded all control of the region and the camp to the Germans. Their only condition for the camp was that all supplies came from Serbian territory and that the guards were all Germans.<sup>34</sup> After a month and half of preparation, the camp opened in December 1941 and began accepting its first inmates. Between Belgrade's occupation and the opening of the camp, Sajmište was used a final time as an exhibition grounds.<sup>35</sup> The exhibitions promoted the new fascist ideology in Nedi's Serbia. The first exhibit explained the failure of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia through anti-Masonic propaganda. The second, presenting the various ties between Bolshevism and Jews, occurred while the camp was being transformed into a concentration camp. The Serbian government officially endorsed both of these exhibitions.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Marta Vukoti Lazar and Jasmina oki, "Complex History as a Source of Planning Problems: Old Belgrade Fairground," *Spatium* 13-14 (2006): 2, and Jovan Byford, "Before 1941: The Belgrade Exhibition Grounds," *Semlin Judenlager*, Accessed 20 November 2010, <<http://www.semllin.info/>>.

<sup>33</sup> Hilberg, *The Destruction of the European Jews*, 691, and Browning, "The Final Solution in Serbia": 58.

<sup>34</sup> Browning, "The Final Solution in Serbia": 59.

<sup>35</sup> Manojlovi Pintar, "Delusion and Amnesia": 14.

<sup>36</sup> Manojlovi Pintar, "Delusion and Amnesia": 15.

Over five thousand Jews arrived at Sajmište in December 1941 and the population continued to rise. That winter, temperatures became frigid. The Sava River froze while the buildings housing the Jews remained unheated.<sup>37</sup> The inmates at Sajmište were forced to do physical labor, such as shoveling snow from the nearby military airfield.<sup>38</sup> The authorities forbid bringing in food other than the official rations, a ban that remained despite internal complaints of poor food quality. Requests to double the rations were subsequently vetoed while reports noted that noting that the food represented an “absolute minimum [of] required rations.”<sup>39</sup>

As soon as the camp opened, the Foreign Office Plenipotentiary in Belgrade, Felix Benzler, urged Berlin to begin deportations of the Sajmište Jews to the East. By the early spring, the German authorities recognized that the planned deportations were not forthcoming.<sup>40</sup> Turner requested that gas vans, which had previously been used to kill people with mental or physical disabilities in Nazi Germany, be sent from Berlin to Belgrade. Locally known as a *dušegupka*, translated as murder-van, the van was rigged so that the exhaust pipe could be reattached to redirect the exhaust fumes into to the hermetically sealed compartment containing the Jews. The first victims were Jewish staff and patients at the Belgrade Jewish hospital, followed by the inmates at Sajmište. Taken in groups of eighty to one hundred, the Jews were told that they were to be transported from Sajmište to an unspecified location to make room for communists. The authorities initially selected volunteers to board the vans. The remaining inmates requested those being moved to leave a note in the van describing the new location. Having never received any

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<sup>37</sup> Byford, “History of the Holocaust in Serbia,” <<http://www.semmlin.info/>>.

<sup>38</sup> Browning, “The Final Solution in Serbia”: 60.

<sup>39</sup> Browning, “The Final Solution in Serbia”: 63.

<sup>40</sup> Browning, “The Final Solution in Serbia”: 76, and Byford, “Semlin Judenlager 1941-1942,” <<http://www.semmlin.info/>>.

notes, the inmates became suspicious and the number of volunteers dwindled.<sup>41</sup> The authorities then began creating lists of Jews to be killed. Once loaded, the trucks

drove to the Sava bridge just several hundred meters from the camp entrance... On the far side of the bridge, the gas van stopped and one of the drivers climbed out and worked underneath it, connecting the exhaust to the sealed compartment. The baggage truck turned off the road while the gas van and the commandant's car drove through the middle of Belgrade to reach a shooting range at Avala [Jajinci] ten kilometres south of the city.<sup>42</sup>

These gas vans ultimately killed 6,300 of the Jewish inmates. Some fifty women survived the camp and the remainder died due to the conditions at Sajmište. They survived because they were married to Serbian men who secured their release from Sajmište.<sup>43</sup>

Following the destruction of Serbia's Jewish community, the Germans transformed Sajmište into an internment camp for various political enemies. These inmates included partisan resistance fighters, communists, and anti-fascist forces among others.<sup>44</sup> The official name of the camp was changed from Semlin Judenlager to Semlin Anhaltelager to reflect the camp's transformed function. Over thirty thousand political prisoners entered Sajmište as an internment camp from May 1942 to July 1944. The majority of the prisoners were Serbs, with smaller numbers of Croats, Bosnian Muslims, Jews, and Roma. At least a third of the inmates died while in Sajmište from exhaustion, dysentery, or severe beatings. They were buried in mass graves in the Jewish cemetery in Zemun, Jajinci, or other locales around Belgrade.<sup>45</sup> Before the camp officially closed, the surviving inmates were transferred to other camps in Eastern and Northern Europe where most met their deaths.

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<sup>41</sup> *Sajmište: The History of a Camp*, DVD, Directed by Marko Popović and Srđan Mitrović. Belgrade, Serbia: B92, 2009.

<sup>42</sup> Browning, "The Final Solution in Serbia": 80 ff.

<sup>43</sup> Byford, "Semlin Judenlager 1941-1942," <<http://www.semmlin.info/>>.

<sup>44</sup> Radović, "Politics of Space and Memory in Serbia": 3.

<sup>45</sup> Byford, "Semlin Judenlager 1941-1942," <<http://www.semmlin.info/>>.

The Allied bombings in 1944 forced Sajmište to close. Due to the camps location near the main bridges in Belgrade, it was subjected to accidental bombings. After the city's liberation by Tito's Partisans, the left bank of the Sava River was destined to become the capital for Yugoslavia's future federal government. Youth Brigades, who had formally been constructing railways and roads, were now commissioned to work on the new city. During this process, they were housed in the remaining pavilions at Sajmište. Many brigadiers sole purpose was to remove the rubble and repair the surviving buildings for additional housing units.<sup>46</sup>

The conflict between Tito and Stalin in 1948 temporarily limited the number of loans Yugoslavia could receive from the Soviet Union halting construction. The Youth Brigades left Sajmište for other projects.<sup>47</sup> Following the brigadiers' departure, the Belgrade municipality invited artists to repopulate the Sajmište complex. These artists, including painters, sculptors, and writers, established ateliers in which they worked and lived at Sajmište. Also during this time, many families moved into the neighborhood under questionable circumstances, occupying some of the pavilions and constructing adjacent structures.<sup>48</sup> Today many people and artists continue to live and work at Sajmite. The remaining structures have been populated by restaurants, businesses and even a nightclub.

### **Sajmište in the Socialist Era**

During the Socialist era, Sajmište was largely forgotten in public memory. The same can be said about the history of the Holocaust and the destruction of Serbian Jewry. The Yugoslav authorities acted mainly out of ideological reasons. Their actions have had a lasting effect on Sajmište's legacy in Serbian public memory. The narrative was first rewritten to allow for the

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<sup>46</sup> Byford, "Half-Recognizing' The Holocaust": 2.

<sup>47</sup> Byford, "Half-Recognizing' The Holocaust": 5.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

Yugoslav ideology to spread throughout society and then reduced to fit the established official, ideological narrative.

Following the end of the Second World War, Yugoslavia established the Yugoslav State Commission for the Investigation of War Crimes. The commission's sole purpose was to investigate the crimes committed by the Nazis and the Serbian collaborationist forces during the Second World War. The Commission concluded their findings with a twenty-five-page report. In it they describe Sajmište as a "place of torture for the people of Yugoslavia."<sup>49</sup> The report concluded that 80,000 people passed through Sajmište, and half of them died. Modern scholarship has disproved this claim, asserting that the real number is much smaller.<sup>50</sup> During the Nuremberg Trial, the commission's report was a significant piece of evidence in Yugoslavia's argument for reparations. In his article, "'Half-Recognizing' The Holocaust: Negotiating A Place For the Destruction of Jews in Serbia Public Memory," Jovan Byford claims that this report and its conclusions have had a lasting impact on Serbian public memory.<sup>51</sup> This commission marks the first instance that Sajmište's memory was manipulated for political purposes. It also denotes the beginning of a trend of marginalizing the Holocaust in Serbian public memory.

### *Rewritten Memory*

Looking toward the future, Yugoslavia began formulating a long-term plan for Belgrade's urban development. The city would grow across the river creating a new Belgrade. The government brought in hundreds of members of the Youth Brigade to assist in Novi Beograd's construction. The majority of the brigadiers came from other parts of Yugoslavia and were therefore oblivious to Sajmište's recent past. The former camp was the center of their social

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<sup>49</sup> Byford, "Half-Recognizing' The Holocaust": 4.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

lives. The brigadiers were unaware that they were living, sleeping, eating and relaxing in the same buildings where many people and the majority of Serbian Jewry spent their last days. Byford notes that despite all of this “the authorities, who were undoubtedly aware of Sajmište’s history, did very little to reverse this state of affairs.” “The reasons for this” Byford claims “were, above all, ideological.”<sup>52</sup>

To understand Byford’s claim, it is necessary to look at Sajmište from an urban planning standpoint. Dr. Ljiljana Blagojević’s article, “Back to the Future of New Belgrade: Functional Past of the Modern City” addresses the ideological underpinnings of Novi Beograd’s construction. Blagojević states, “New Belgrade strongly reflected an ideological construct of a new beginning, that is, [a] building of socialism on a clean slate.”<sup>53</sup> For this ideology to hold, Novi Beograd needed to be built on ‘clean’ ground. The fact that Sajmište was built on a former Nazi concentration camp was a problem for the Yugoslav authorities. Therefore, the authorities invented a new narrative “whereby the traumatic history had been suspended, and the beginning of a new history was re-established.”<sup>54</sup> Sajmište was subsequently renamed ‘Block 17’, highlighting the attitudes of the “politicians and communist party officials who, at all times closely oversaw the planning and construction process.”<sup>55</sup>

Other ideological forces played into the government’s decision to abandon Sajmište. Vukotić and Lazar claim that the Yugoslav authorities wanted a monopoly on modernizing the country:

Any previous effort regarding modernization was minimized, if not completely denied. The industrialization and urbanization were imperatives, and a kind of continuously repeated mantra of communist regime. As whole industr[ies were] ruined during the war, there was a simulation that everything should start from the very beginning. Also, pre-war urbanism was considered as conservative and

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> Ljiljana Blagojević, “Back to the Future of New Belgrade: Functional Past of the Modern City,” AESOP 05 Conference, Vienna, Austria, July 2005, 5.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> Byford, “Half-Recognizing’ The Holocaust”: 5.

anachronous, even if falsification of historical facts was necessary. Such an attitude led to ignoring Master plan from 1923, and few realized complexes in the territory known as New Belgrade (old airport designed by famous physician, astronomer and civilian engineer Milutin Milankovi , as noted above), including Old Belgrade Fairground.<sup>56</sup>

The Yugoslav authority's decision to abandon the site as to create an environment more susceptible to its ideology marks another point in Sajmište's history in which its memory was modified by the political environment.

In 1948, Stalin's Soviet Union expelled the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia from the Communist Information Bureau.<sup>57</sup> The reasons for this occurrence were manifold. This split greatly affected Yugoslavia's future in the bipolar world and had a lasting effect on the development of Novi Beograd. The original plans for the city were based on a guarantee of loans from the Soviet Union.<sup>58</sup> Without the Soviet's financial support, Yugoslavia was forced temporarily to abandon many of their plans for the new city.<sup>59</sup> The Yugoslav authorities ordered a construction moratorium and the Youth Brigadiers departed from the site. Sajmište was then officially marked for destruction. This designation lasted until 1987.<sup>60</sup>

Following the Youth Brigade's departure from Sajmište, the Yugoslav authorities encouraged a number of prominent artists to establish their ateliers in the smaller pavilions.<sup>61</sup> In addition to working at the site, many artists began living in the dilapidated structures.<sup>62</sup> Olga Manojlovi Pintar, a historian at the Institute for the New History of Serbia, spoke about this period. She claims that their introduction was another effort by the government to transform Sajmište's memory to fit their ideology. Their arrival was a way of giving Sajmište a new

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<sup>56</sup> Vukoti Lazar and oki , "Complex History as a Source of Planning Problems": 5.

<sup>57</sup> Popovi , 25 November 2010.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> Manojlovi Pintar, 15 November 2010.

<sup>60</sup> Byford, "Half-Recognizing' The Holocaust": 10, and Interview with Maja Popovi , 25 November 2010.

<sup>61</sup> Interview with Olga Manojlovi Pintar, 15 November 2010.

<sup>62</sup> Popovi , 25 November 2010.

purpose to cover up the concentration camp's legacy.<sup>63</sup> In spite of poor working and living conditions, Byford's claims that this period is still viewed in a positive light reveals that their introduction did have an affect on Sajmište's legacy in public memory. He claims that the artist's arrival is perceived as a "welcome transformation of space" because it added "positive value" to the former concentration camp.<sup>64</sup> Maja Popovi , a native of Belgrade and an architecture student in the Netherlands, understood the establishment of the artist colony at Sajmište to be a way of erasing the past by the Yugoslav authorities in order to continue the development of Novi Beograd.<sup>65</sup>

### *Reduced Memory*

Despite being the largest concentration camp in Serbia and Belgrade, the Yugoslav did not recognize Sajmište as deserving of commemoration until 1984.<sup>66</sup> Several unofficial monuments sprung up at the site between 1944 and 1984, but none recognized the site's role in the destruction of Serbian Jewry. Neither did the first official ceremony in 1984. During this period, Sajmište's memory was reduced to fit the dominant ideology and to serve various purposes. Understanding how and why Sajmište was commemorated in this fashion is one of the largest aspects of Sajmište's role in Serbian public memory.

In 1951, a branch of the Union of Fighters of the 10th borough of Belgrade placed the first plaque at Sajmište. This was done as a means of marking the tenth anniversary of the Partisan uprising in Yugoslavia. On the location of a mass grave, the plaque, named 'Partisan Cemetery', read

At this site, between 1941 and the liberation of Belgrade, the fascist occupier murdered 8,000 of our country's best sons and daughters after torturing them at

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<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> Byford, "Half-Recognizing' The Holocaust": 5.

<sup>65</sup> Popovi , 25 November 2010.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

the Sajmište camp. The dead gave their lives as a contribution to the heroic struggle of the people of Yugoslavia for freedom and the independence of our fatherland.<sup>67</sup>

The plaque's wording reveals a significant amount about how Sajmište's legacy had been transformed only ten years after it opened. The number 8,000 refers only to the Partisans who died at Sajmište. Several phrases, such as 'our country's best sons and daughters' and 'contribution to the heroic struggle' signify the sites incorporation into the dominant trends of the time. Those phrases were traditionally reserved for Partisans, whose heroism was celebrated over the civilian population's suffering.<sup>68</sup> Therefore, the text leads any reader to believe that from 1941 until 1944, everyone who passed through Sajmište was a Partisan. This marks the first time that a memorial effort ignored the camp's history as a concentration camp for Jews.

Sajmište received its second small memorial plaque in October 1974, for the thirtieth anniversary of Belgrade's liberation. Like the first plaque, this one was affixed to the outside of one of the buildings in a secluded area. The plaque states

At the site of the old exhibition halls, the German Gestapo founded in 1941 the "Sajmište" camp where with the aid of domestic traitors, over forty thousand people from different parts of our country were brutally tortured and killed.<sup>69</sup>

Byford suggests that because of the original inscription's violation of grammar and orthography, it was designed and created by an unofficial group looking to commemorate the city's liberation. The plaque equalizes all of the inmates suffering, whether they were part of a systematic genocide against the Jewish population, or killed as political prisoners.

While the Yugoslav government abandoned Sajmište, other Second World War sites received official acknowledgement and recognition. Part of Banjica, the former concentration camp, was even transformed into an official national museum. Sr an Radovi , a research fellow

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<sup>67</sup> Byford, "Half-Recognizing' The Holocaust": 6.

<sup>68</sup> Byford, "Half-Recognizing' The Holocaust": 7.

<sup>69</sup> Byford, "Half-Recognizing' The Holocaust": 8.

at the Serbian Ministry of Science and a PhD candidate at the University of Belgrade's Philosophy Faculty, attempted to explain why Sajmište was abandoned when other camps became important sites of memory.<sup>70</sup> He believes that, "Sajmište's fate is, and always has been, connected with the political elites in Yugoslavia and Serbia."<sup>71</sup> Ms. Manojlovi Pintar believes that this was also related to ideological tendencies, as the Yugoslav authorities were conscious not to bring up questions of ethnicity, nationality, or race when it came to victims. This followed the national motto of 'brotherhood and unity' in which the collective is placed above the individual.<sup>72</sup>

As to why Banjica received different treatment, Mr. Radovi believes that their existence helped propagate the Partisan ideology. Until the late 1980s, schoolchildren from Belgrade would make annual visits to the Banjica museum. Mr. Radovi and Ms. Manojlovi Pintar do not remember Sajmište being brought up at all in their childhood education. Mr. Radovi stated, "people came from all across Yugoslavia to be interned at Banjica. Every ethnic group was there." Therefore, Banjica could truly be a site of suffering for all 'Yugoslav peoples' whereas Sajmište had a clear ethnic component. Mr. Radovi added, "many high-profile communists were held at Banjica as were many communist women. Banjica is the place where the myth of the Partisan woman was born." He sees Banjica as a site commemorating the victors, whereas Sajmište is only about the victims.<sup>73</sup>

In 1984, the then Mayor of Belgrade, Bogdan Bogdanovi , unveiled another monument at Sajmište.<sup>74</sup> For all intents and purposes, this monument was identical to the 1974 plaque. It had the same inscription and had an identical ornamentation. However, this monument was placed in

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<sup>70</sup> Sr an Radovi is also the author of the text "Politics of Space and Memory in Serbia or: How One Learns to Stop Worrying about the Camp and Love the Mall" which is used throughout this paper.

<sup>71</sup> Interview with Sr an Radovi , 11 November 2010.

<sup>72</sup> Manojlovi Pintar, 15 November 2010.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

<sup>74</sup> Byford, "Half-Recognizing' The Holocaust": 9.

a central location, directly to the east of the central tower. Byford claims that this unveiling signaled the Yugoslav authority's desire to make Sajmište into a place of public gathering.<sup>75</sup> After Tito's death in 1980, the government decided to host more public ceremonies to strengthen the crumbling socialist ideology.<sup>76</sup> The city council decided to add Sajmište to the official calendar and mark the day as a day of commemoration. The city chose to commemorate Sajmište on 9 May, the Day of Victory over Fascism. This act further incorporated Sajmište into the dominant narrative; the site became another location for schoolchildren to visit in order to celebrate the Partisan's victory over Fascism.<sup>77</sup> During the 9 May ceremonies, Jewish suffering at Sajmište and the Holocaust were never mentioned.

During the sporadic memorial events at Sajmište, the Holocaust was always marginalized. The main method of doing so was equalizing the suffering of all of Sajmište's inmates. The original state commission was entitled "Sajmište, the place of torture for the people of Yugoslavia" which began a trend of grouping the inmates fates as one.<sup>78</sup> The 'Partisan Cemetery' monument insinuated that all of the inmates at Sajmište were Partisans, ignoring the fact that a systematic genocide against Serbia's Jewry occurred at that site. The 1974 and 1984 monuments highlighted the multi-ethnic Yugoslav aspects of the camp. Under this narrative, Jews suffered the same fate, through the same means, and died for the same reasons as everyone else. The Holocaust's singularity was ignored while the Jewish victims were incorporated as 'victims of Fascism'.

Following the new interest in the site, Belgrade officially included Sajmište on the register of heritage sites. They scrapped the original plans to demolish Sajmište and instead decided to erect a monument at the site. The monument was not completed until after Yugoslavia

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<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

<sup>76</sup> Radovi , "Politics of Space and Memory in Serbia": 4.

<sup>77</sup> Radovi , 11 November 2010.

<sup>78</sup> Byford, "Half-Recognizing' The Holocaust": 12.

dissolved. Its erection during the Milošević era in Belgrade had a lasting impact on Sajmište's legacy in Serbian public memory.

### **Sajmište in the post-Yugoslav Space**

In the late 1980s, a resurgence of nationalism occurred in Yugoslavia. During this period, Jews and Jewish symbols were appropriated by the various ethnic groups in Yugoslavia “in order to convey such meaning and level judgments against one another, thereby hoping to achieve political and moral aims – the elevation of status, prestige, moral superiority, and the legitimacy of one's own national state in the international order of nations and states.”<sup>79</sup> In Serbia, nationalist politicians, intellectual elites and other public figures “exploited the theme of common suffering of Serbs and Jews in order to enhance the image of Serbs as perennial victims of genocidal violence and in doing so to legitimize the nationalist agenda.”<sup>80</sup> This period has had a lasting impact on the marginalization of the Holocaust in Serbian public memory.

#### *Fabricated Memory*

In Serbia, this process occurred through historical revisionism. Dr. Milan Bulajić, the self-described ‘Serbian Simon Wiesenthal’, first revisited the question of Serbian victimhood under the Ustaša in the Independent State of Croatia. He questioned the number of Serbs killed at Jasenovac, claiming that the Yugoslav and Croat authorities were engaged in a “conspiracy of silence” against the Serbian people. The Serbian-Jewish Friendship Society, a state sponsored organization, also played a large role in the historical revisionism that would occur in the following years. The society was comprised of leading nationalist intellectuals and some Jewish public officials. One of the Society's main goals was to promote the “special bond of suffering between Serbs and Jews.”<sup>81</sup> This mainly occurred on a mythical level, in which Serbs and Jews

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<sup>79</sup> P. B. Gordiejew, “Playing with Jews in the Fields of Nations: Symbolic Contests in the Former Yugoslavia,” *Social Identities* 12 (May 2006): 382.

<sup>80</sup> Byford, “When I Say ‘The Holocaust’, I Mean ‘Jasenovac’”: 60.

<sup>81</sup> Byford, “Half-Recognizing’ The Holocaust”: 14.

share the same destiny as the ‘heavenly people’ and the ‘chosen people’. Ljubomir Tadi , the president of the Society, pointed to history as the source of the two people’s bond.

[The strongest tie is the] common fate that the two peoples, including the Roma, suffered as victims of genocide during the Second World War . . . All of the war criminals and all of the victims of genocide, unfortunately, have not yet been established, and this remains one of the most important aims of our Society.<sup>82</sup>

Jewish suffering is referenced only because by the late 1980s, the Holocaust had already become a central part of the European collective memory. Ms. Manojlovi Pintar clarified that during this period “everything was ethnocentric.” The Holocaust continued to be marginalized during the Miloševi regime, regardless of the fact that some acknowledged Jewish suffering at Sajmište. The Holocaust was only referenced to support the myth of Serbian martyrdom and victimhood.

Ms. Manojlovi Pintar attempted to explain this phenomenon by stating that the 1980s and 1990s were period in which every European society began to deal with the past

with respect to how each society analyzed and perceived the Holocaust in their society. In Serbia that process started in the 1980s . . . It is very interesting because instead of dealing with the question of responsibility for the Holocaust, they focused only on the Serbian genocide in the NDH during the Second World War. That became the main force for the nationalistic ideology that threw Serbia into the wars in the 90s. And that identification of Serbian and Jewish victims was the basis of the whole politics of Slobodan Miloševi was introduced.<sup>83</sup>

The lack of dealing with the past accurately led to disastrous results in Serbia. What is worse, she stated, is that no one recognizes this fact and there are no signs of this changing.

Following the Society’s establishment, they joined with Bulaji in declaring their intention to erect a “Serbian Yad Vashem, where it would be recorded that Serbs are one of the greatest victims of genocide” at Sajmište.<sup>84</sup> Bulaji ’s museum, the Belgrade Museum of Genocide Victims, was to play a large role in the envisioned Serbian Yad Vashem. The museum was established by an act of law in 1992 that stated that their museum’s primary purpose was to

<sup>82</sup> Gordiejew, “Playing with Jews in the Fields of Nations”: 389.

<sup>83</sup> Manojlovi Pintar, 15 November 2010.

<sup>84</sup> Byford, “Half-Recognizing’ The Holocaust”: 14. The phrase ‘Serbian Yad Vashem’ references the Israeli national Holocaust museum Yad Vashem in Jerusalem.

“permanently preserve the memory of victims of genocide over the Serbs” in the Independent State of Croatia.<sup>85</sup> The Holocaust in Serbia was only a secondary concern. The proposal never came to fruition, but this event marked a significant point in Sajmište’s legacy in Serbian public memory. From this moment until the fall of the Milošević regime, Sajmište became a place of fabricated memory.

During the Milošević regime, Sajmište received an unprecedented level of interest. However, this was not because of Sajmište’s specific role in the Holocaust. The fact that Sajmište was a Second World War-era site was the main attraction for the nationalists. In addition, nationalist politicians and intellectual elites highlighted Sajmište’s geographical location within the Independent State of Croatia (NDH). Sajmište’s role in the Holocaust in Serbia was overlooked as to create a space in which Sajmište could be used to highlight Serbian suffering at the site.

Following Operation Flash, when the Croatian Army recaptured Jasenovac from the Serb forces, Sajmište became the central location to commemorate the Serbian victims of the Second World War.<sup>86</sup> These commemorations mainly focused on Serbian inmates at Jasenovac, whose deaths played a central role in Serbian martyrdom and victimhood myth. To reflect this shift, Milošević’s government changed the official day of commemoration at Sajmište from 9 May to 22 April. This change marks a significant switch toward fabricating Sajmište’s history. During the Socialist era, all of Sajmište’s former inmates’ suffering was equalized and they were all commemorated as ‘victims of Fascism’. Therefore, the Yugoslav authorities deemed it appropriate to commemorate them on 9 May, the Day of Victory over Fascism. Milošević chose 22 April because it was the day in which Jasenovac’s inmates revolted against the Ustaše.

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<sup>85</sup> Interview with Olga Manojlović Pintar, 8 December 2010.

<sup>86</sup> Manojlović Pintar, 15 November 2010.

On 22 April 1995, the government unveiled Sajmište's new memorial monument. The plaque affixed to the monument reads

Most of the victims were Serbs, Jews or Gypsies. This monument is dedicated to them, and also to the victims to the notorious Ustaša camp in Jasenovac and the victims of Hungarian occupying forces, who were brought to Belgrade by the waves of the Sava and Danube.

Byford correctly notes that these lines reflect the new political environment at the time of its unveiling.<sup>87</sup> The fact that the Serbs are mentioned before Jews and Roma, despite the fact that the camp was first used as part of the systematic genocide of Serbian Jewry, is meaningful. Byford recognizes this and states “the singularity of the Holocaust and the distinctiveness of the fate of the Sajmište Jews were, once again, marginalized.”<sup>88</sup> The commemoration of the Holocaust and the destruction of Serbian Jewry was not the purpose of the monument. The monument and camp were a substitute for Jasenovac and a place to commemorate all Serbs who died during the Second World War.

The then President of Yugoslavia, Zoran Lili , presided over the monument's unveiling. In his speech, Lili made direct references to the “Serbs, Jews, Roma, women, children, and partisans” who died at Sajmište.<sup>89</sup> Lili 's remarks demonstrate a turning point in the evolution of Sajmište and the marginalization of the Holocaust in Serbian public memory. He did not group all of the camp's inmates into the broad category of ‘victims of Fascism’ or ‘people from across Yugoslavia’, unlike the previous plaques and monuments. However, he did not make reference to Sajmište's role in the Holocaust or the singularity of the Jewish suffering at the camp. Byford claims that “the rhetoric of comparative martyrdom, manifested in the use of the triad ‘Serbs, Jews and Roma’ [which Lili and the monument used] essentially deprives the Holocaust of its status as a discrete historical event, one whose magnitude and uniqueness are worthy of

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<sup>87</sup> Byford, “Half-Recognizing’ The Holocaust”: 18.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid.

<sup>89</sup> Byford, “When I Say ‘The Holocaust’, I Mean ‘Jasenovac’”: 67.

meaningful commemoration in its own right.”<sup>90</sup> In doing so, he fabricated Sajmište’s memory to include it in the wider system of Ustaša camps during the Second World War.

### *Erased Memory*

Following Slobodan Milošević’s regime’s overthrow on 5 October 2000, all official events at Sajmište stopped. The site was no longer a location to commemorate Serbian victims during the Second World War. Neither did it become a place to commemorate the Holocaust and the destruction of Serbia’s Jewry. The lack of attention paid to Sajmište allowed its legacy to fade away from Serbian public memory. Currently, it remains a derelict site filled with restaurants, football fields, and illegal housing units.

An advisor in the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy’s Sector for Protection of War Veterans, acknowledged Sajmište’s nonexistent role in Serbian public memory. To illustrate this point, he gave an example of the average Serbian’s knowledge regarding Sajmište:

If you tell someone, ‘Okay, do you know about Staro Sajmište?’ They will go, ‘It was a fairground, something terrible happened there during the war, it’s a nice place to go for a walk down the river, there are nice clubs, there is an ugly monument in front of it. It’s not very nice because there are a lot of demolished buildings.’ All in all, most people aren’t aware of the significance of the events that occurred there.<sup>91</sup>

He recognized that “Staro Sajmište was completely expelled from our individual memory.”<sup>92</sup>

Ms. Manojlovi Pintar asserted that Sajmište’s current legacy in Serbian public memory is linked with a general amnesia of Serbia’s Jewry. “People in Yugoslavia knew about the fact that the Jewish population was killed, but the memory of their life and how important part of society they were before the war somehow was lost.”<sup>93</sup> When asked about Sajmište itself, Ms. Manojlovi Pintar claims that it is still an empty shell in public memory:

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<sup>90</sup> Byford, “When I Say ‘The Holocaust’, I Mean ‘Jasenovac’”: 59.

<sup>91</sup> Interview by the author, 22 November 2010.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid.

<sup>93</sup> Manojlovi Pintar, 15 November 2010.

Although it is in the center of the city, it is unnoticed by Belgrade's citizens. Every day you have hundreds of thousands of people crossing the bridge ... we made several research asking citizens of Serbia do they know if there were concentration camps during Belgrade during the Second World. 82 or 83 percent said they know that there were concentration camps. 92 percent of citizens of Belgrade know that there camps. But except for the knowledge that there was a camp, you don't have a stronger collective... a process of facing the past... and it's connected to German troops. Germans were the ones who organized the whole process of Jewish move to the camp and executions and so on. This is the main explanation, 'Jewish people suffered, Serbian people suffered, we are equal'.<sup>94</sup>

Despite the fact that overwhelming majority of the population is aware of the camp's existence, its history and legacy have been erased. Sajmište is not a place that was a vehicle for the systematic destruction of Serbian Jewry. It is just a historical remnant that can be viewed while crossing the bridges over the Sava River.

Ms. Popovi came of age during the Miloševi regime, and as part of the 1995 ceremony at Sajmište, her primary school brought her class to the monument. They learned that it was part of a "general fight against Fascism." Later in life, when Ms. Popovi learned about Sajmište's history, she claims that she felt very angry to have never learned the truth while in school. "We never actually learned that our whole Jewish community, Serbia's Jewish community, actually ended up in that camp ... I realized how much we didn't know about [Sajmište]."<sup>95</sup> Popovi also commented on the current state of the site and how that is a reflection of the site's legacy in Serbian public memory. "In the mortuary or place of torture [the Turkish pavilion], there is now a restaurant ... I want to ask the cook of the restaurant, 'Do you know what was going on here seventy years ago?' I don't think that they would know. I think a lot of people really don't know what happened there."<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>94</sup> Ibid.

<sup>95</sup> Popovi , 25 November 2010.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid.

The memory of the Holocaust in Serbia has also been greatly marginalized in contemporary Serbia, due to the legacy of Milošević's regime. Byford claims that because of the Society of Serbian-Jewish Friendship and other institutions that idealized historical Serbian-Jewish relations, the Holocaust "tends to be kept off the public agenda and treated as free of controversy."<sup>97</sup> The marginalization is most apparent in the education system. In high schools, Jewish suffering during the Second World War is only mentioned in connection with the Serbian genocides in the NDH and in Kosovo. The only concentration camp mentioned is Jasenovac and the fate of Serbia's Jewry is regulated to a single paragraph, Sajmište's role in the Holocaust in Serbia is completely erased. One textbook for elementary schools mentions the Holocaust along with statements highlighting the Serbian-Jewish relationship.<sup>98</sup>

### **Memorialization Efforts**

Over the course of last sixty-five years, the authorities never intended Sajmište to be a housing area. Due to its changing status since the Second World War, the pavilions and buildings at the site were never demolished and still exist. Many people currently live at the site and have illegally modified the pavilions into housing structures.<sup>99</sup> The Belgrade municipality still owns several pavilions and continues to rent out the spaces to artists.<sup>100</sup> Their presence, and the dilapidated state of the site have a lasting impact on Sajmište's legacy in Serbian public memory. When crossing the bridges over the Sava River, walking on the riverbank, or driving in Novi Beograd, Sajmište is only noticeable because it is the only undeveloped area on the riverbank. Any future development at Sajmište must deal with the issue of its current inhabitants, who have been working and living on the site for the past half century.

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<sup>97</sup> Byford, "When I Say 'The Holocaust', I Mean 'Jasenovac'": 52.

<sup>98</sup> Emil Kerenji, "The State of Holocaust Research in Serbia," International Interdisciplinary Conference on the State of Holocaust Studies in South Eastern Europe: Problems, Obstacles and Perspectives in Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina, 28 October 2006, 12 ff.

<sup>99</sup> Popovi, 25 November 2010, and Radovi, 11 November 2010.

<sup>100</sup> Interview with Rena Raedle, 6 December 2010.

The next phase of Sajmište's legacy in Serbian public memory has yet to be determined. The consensus among historians, artists, art historians, architects, urban planners, anthropologists, informed citizens, and government officials, is that something needs to occur at the site. Sajmište's legacy in public memory will undoubtedly be decided by what occurs or does not occur at the site in the following years. Without any action, Sajmište will remain neglected in Serbian public memory, vulnerable to manipulation by the next generation of political and intellectual elites.

### *Official Proposals*

On 25 January 2008, the Novi Beograd municipality announced on their website the government's intentions to build a memorial center at Sajmište.<sup>101</sup> As of 2010, the government's report has not been published publicly and there has not been any announced progress. The government advisor claims that the government's proposal will be finalized by 2011 and enacted within the coming years. The government's initiative is a joint effort of the Ministries of Culture, Labour and Social Policy, and Education, but will soon move to the Office of the President.<sup>102</sup>

The government advisor claims that after Serbia became an independent country in 2006, the government began a committee to investigate what should be done at the site. The government advisor was one of the leaders on the committee and is currently engaged in the implementation of the committee's findings. The committee proposed the construction of a memorial center on "the spot of the former death camp" whose official name will be 'Staro Sajmište Memorial Center'. The center "will deal with the events that occurred there during the Second World War, but [will] also incorporate wider elaboration of the Second World War on the territory of the former Yugoslavia and Serbia."

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<sup>101</sup> Byford, "Hronologija Doga aja na Sajmištu od 1945. do Danas," <<http://www.semmlin.info/>>.

<sup>102</sup> Author, 22 November 2010.

The government advisor said that the new center would tell “the story of the Holocaust and the story of the [Serbian] genocide.” The government plans on reconstructing the existing pavilions and its surroundings. In the future, they also plan on rebuilding the pavilions that were completely destroyed in previous decades. Some of the pavilions will have different purposes, “in order for the visitors to get as much as they can” from the new center. According to the government advisor, the government hopes to move the Belgrade Museum of Genocide Victims to the site, once the necessary infrastructure is rebuilt.

Before the proposal can be officially enacted, the government advisor claimed that significant work must be done to familiarize the public with Sajmište’s significance. The main way the government is assuring this will occur is by staging biannual ceremonies at the site to commemorate the victims. These events take place on 27 January, the International Holocaust Remembrance Day, and on 22 April, the national Remembrance Day for the Victims of the Second World War Genocide. Since 2006, high-level officials have attended the ceremonies at Sajmište on behalf of the Serbian government. On 27 January 2010, the Serbian President Boris Tadić became the first president to visit Sajmište. Other educational activities will continue to occur once the memorial center is completed and several of the pavilions are transformed into classrooms for visiting schoolchildren.

It is important to stress that while the government’s proposal may be the only official proposal, its enactment is by no means inevitable. Mr. Aleskandar Nećak, the President of the Federation of Jewish Communities in Serbia, was a member of the government’s committee on Sajmište. Mr. Nećak, along with Ms. Vojislava Radovanović, the Director of the Jewish Historical Museum in Belgrade, expressed their skepticism of the government’s plans and their intention to enact the proposal.

Mr. Ne ak doubts the government's intention to follow through on their proposal to the point where he has stopped mentioning the proposal in conversations about memorialization efforts at Sajmište. He no longer goes to the Task Force for International Cooperation on Holocaust Education, Remembrance, and Research (ITF) delegation meetings to update the organization on Sajmište. This is because he believes that there really are not any new developments: "I recognized that I am speaking about the project at Sajmište, but I don't really have my government's backing. So I stopped going. The last meeting was in Stockholm and I said to myself, 'No. I am not going.' Because it is shameful for me speaking on such a thing while my government is silent."<sup>103</sup>

Ms. Radovanovi believes that the Serbian government is not opposed to the proposal, but that nothing will ever be realized at Sajmište.

They have nothing against it, they are just very silent. They listen. They say, "Yes, yes. This is excellent." But after that statement, nothing. Other countries would give an excuse. But here, no. They say it's excellent, but continue to do nothing.<sup>104</sup>

Both Mr. Ne ak and Ms. Radovanovi stated that the international community is supportive of establishing a memorial center at Sajmište. "But in Serbia, no one takes this [effort] seriously."<sup>105</sup>

### *Unofficial Proposals*

Due to the government's inaction with regard to Sajmište, many people connected with Sajmište have subsequently developed their own proposals and ideas as to what should happen in the future. It is rare that two of these unofficial proposals would be identical to one another, as aspects of individual proposals contradict another's vision of the site. Everyone has a unique vision of what they would like to see occur at Sajmište, depending on what they view as the most important aspects of Sajmište's history.

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<sup>103</sup> Interview with Aleksandar Ne ak. Conducted 8 December 2010.

<sup>104</sup> Interview with Vojislava Radovanovi , Conducted 8 December 2010.

<sup>105</sup> Ne ak, 8 December 2010.

When Mr. Radovi was informed about the government's proposal, he strongly expressed his dissatisfaction with their plans. His main criticism was in regard to the proposed center. He pejoratively termed the center a 'tolerance museum' in reference to the government's proposal, which he claims has no purpose. He said he is "skeptical of the all-inclusive center idea" as it "is easy to blur [the] history together."<sup>106</sup> Doing so, he believes, would render the museum meaningless. He thinks that the museum needs to focus only on Sajmište and its history. "Doing otherwise is demeaning towards those who died at Sajmište and is insulting to their memory."<sup>107</sup>

As for his vision of the site's future, Mr. Radovi stated that he could not imagine "anything appropriate occurring on the site for at least the next ten years. And for that to happen, there needs to be a complete change in Holocaust education" in Serbian schools.<sup>108</sup> His estimate of at least ten years reflects his opinion that it is the political environment that is preventing a substantial memorial, not the site itself. Mr. Radovi understands that the historical revisionism that has occurred and continues to occur with Sajmište is used to prevent conversations about possible genocides during the Yugoslav Wars.<sup>109</sup>

Ms. Manojlovi Pintar expressed similar views to Radovi. She criticized the idea of a tolerance museum at Sajmište but supported the idea of a memorial center.<sup>110</sup> For her, it would make more sense to have a tolerance museum "anywhere in the world, like California," rather than on the site of a former concentration camp. In her opinion, Sajmište must "be organized as some kind of memorial center which must be constantly raised questions of tolerance and questions of bystanders and intolerance."<sup>111</sup>

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<sup>106</sup> Radovi, 11 November 2010.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid.

<sup>108</sup> Radovi, 11 November 2010.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid.

<sup>110</sup> Manojlovi Pintar, 15 November 2010.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid.

So that the Serbian narrative does not dominate any future museum, center, or memorial at Sajmište, Ms. Manojlovi Pintar said that there has to be a complete rethinking and reeducation of the Holocaust. But this can only occur after there is an open discussion about the Yugoslav Wars in Serbia.<sup>112</sup>

The nationalization of anti-Fascism was the main way in which the process of disintegration of YU started. During the 90s, the whole idea of Milan Nedić arose. But that government helped the whole process of killing of the whole Jewish population. It's always ethnocentric. It's always Serbian ethnicity that is in focus. You don't see others from that perspective ... I think [the memory of the Holocaust and the memory of the Yugoslav Wars] are interconnected. I think that one is changing the picture of the other. You have to solve both of them - the Holocaust and the wars of the 90s. But since many of those who participated in wars of the 90s are still present in public space you still have a very long way to go to find the final solution. I am not optimistic because even among us historians you don't have precise and clear answers to those questions. We are divided and the whole society in that respect is still divided.

Like the government advisor and Mr. Radović, Ms. Manojlovi Pintar recognizes that additional education and an awareness of the past are necessary precursors to any development at Sajmište.

Ms. Manojlovi Pintar also introduced the work of the group, Conversations on Artistic Works, led by Milica Tomić, Branislav Stojanović, and Negojša Miliki. Their efforts mainly revolve around the memories of those who died during the Yugoslav Wars, but have also begun addressing the question of the memories of Holocaust victims.<sup>113</sup> They addressed the issue of equalizing victims, which was they considered to be the norm in Serbian society, and came out against a proposed monument for the victims of the 1990s. Ms. Manojlovi Pintar summed up their views by stating that it does not make sense to remember “the Muslims of Srebrenica at the same place and time as we remember the memories of those soldiers who fought for [the Serbian paramilitary leader Željko Ražnatović, known as] Arkan or other groups.”<sup>114</sup>

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<sup>112</sup> Ibid.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid.

Tomi , Stojanovi , and Miliki then applied this thinking to Holocaust victims and the question of Sajmište. To solve the victim's equalization, "they introduced the concept of a dialogue as the as a means of dealing with the past."<sup>115</sup> She supports their solution because it keeps Sajmište and the Holocaust in the public memory. She believes that it will also prevent the Serbian authorities from assuming that once their proposal has been enacted, the conversation is finished and everyone can once again forget about Sajmište and the Holocaust in Serbia.<sup>116</sup>

Sajmište's architectural significance was the first thing that got Ms. Maja Popovi 's interested in the site. However, Sajmište's legacy in Serbian public memory is the reason why she chose to focus her studies on the site.<sup>117</sup> Her master's thesis will be in the form of a design project of her vision for Sajmište. She is creating a model of a library, which she believes should be built at Sajmište as part of the current memorialization effort. This library would be open to the public, free of charge, and contain international and domestic texts. Ms. Popovi thinks that building a library is more appropriate than a memorial center or museum because libraries are "the only truly democratic institution." She believes that libraries are unique in that anyone can have access their information and make their own ideas and conclusions instead of a prewritten museum exhibit.<sup>118</sup>

Rena Raedle, an artist who has been involved with Sajmište since 2009, has also developed a vision for the site. Over the last year she has been running a program, that hopes to open dialogues on Sajmište's legacy and memory. Sponsored by the independently financed REX Cultural Center, Ms. Raedle's program works with Serbian and German teenagers in developing a website called 'Visits to Staro Sajmište'.<sup>119</sup> The website will contain an audio

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<sup>115</sup> Ibid.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid.

<sup>117</sup> Popovi , 25 November 2010.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid.

<sup>119</sup> Raedle, 6 December 2010.

slideshow of interviews with many groups of peoples connected to Sajmište. Ms. Raedle said that the website will also include English transcriptions of the interviews for international visitors. The aim is to raise the public's awareness of Sajmište and its history. When asked about Sajmište's, Ms. Raedle responded that now is not the right time to build anything at the site. Based on her project, she has concluded that nothing should happen with the site until there are several public discussions on Sajmište. After doing so, the state can officially decide what to do with the site. If it were up to her, Ms. Raedle said she does not think there needs to be a museum, center, or new monument at Sajmište. Her vision is of a memorial park, an open space whose sole purpose is remembering those who died<sup>120</sup>

Another unofficial proposal for Sajmište's future came from B92, an independent Serbian broadcasting company. In 2009, B92 commissioned Marko Popovi and Sr an Mitrovi to direct a documentary detailing Sajmište's history during the Second World War.<sup>121</sup> The documentary was presented in two parts. One section was on the history of the Jewish concentration camp and other told the story of the internment camp for political prisoners. B92's aim was to air the documentary and trigger a national discussion on the future of Sajmište. They favor constructing a tolerance center at Sajmište. Unfortunately, the documentary did not garner a large number of viewers. The film's showing did not generate any significant discussions much to the dismay of B92.<sup>122</sup> However, B92's documentary is not without any success. The documentary contains an impressive amount of information and survivor testimonies. Its availability on DVD and on the Internet allows the documentary to be used as a resource for anyone seeking to learn about Sajmište's true history or for future educational purposes.

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<sup>120</sup> Ibid.

<sup>121</sup> Interview with Marko Popovi , 8 November 2010.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid.

As for the Jewish community, Mr. Ne ak and Ms. Radovanovi said they would be satisfied with a very small change to the site. “We just want a small monument,” Mr. Ne ak said. “Somewhere where the Jewish community can visit once a year and place flowers. That would be enough.”<sup>123</sup>

## **Conclusion**

Over the past sixty-five years, Sajmište’s legacy in Serbian public memory has been manipulated according to the dominant ideology to fit various political purposes. This process began immediately following the end of the Second World War and continued until the fall of Miloševi ’s regime in 2000. As a result of this political manipulation, Sajmište’s role in the Holocaust was marginalized. Jewish suffering during the Second World War was frequently recognized while the Holocaust’s uniqueness was continually denied. This process has led to Sajmište and the Holocaust being neglected in contemporary Serbian public memory. For this to be amended, the physical site must be altered to commemorate those who died at Sajmište.

The future of Sajmište rests solely in the hands of Serbian society. It is their responsibility to amend what their predecessors have done to Sajmište’s legacy and that of the Holocaust at Sajmište in Serbian public memory. While not everyone agrees on the nature of Sajmište’s future, there is a consensus that something needs to occur. They need to pressure their government to provide the means in which Sajmište’s memory can be restored. Without government support, however, all of the abovementioned proposals will amount to nothing. Since the government first announced its intention to build a museum at Sajmište in 2008, no noticeable progress has been made. The official proposal has not yet been put into law by the Serbian government and Sajmište’s role and that of the Holocaust in Serbian public memory are still insignificant. This will remain the case until the government considers this project a priority.

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<sup>123</sup> Ne ak, 8 December 2010.

All those with a connection to Sajmište, including those who were part of the government's committee on Sajmište, claim that no significant progress will occur in the foreseeable future. The exact reasoning behind the government's inaction remains unknown, but it is clear that the government does not consider this project to be a priority.

This research paper has demonstrated that Sajmište's memory is especially vulnerable to manipulation. Building a memorial or museum at Sajmište is just the first step in preventing future manipulation by political and intellectual elites. There need to be further educational initiatives that will bring Sajmište's memory back from desolation. Such initiatives should include but are not limited to Sajmište's history, the Holocaust in Serbia, and the Yugoslav Wars. Without doing so, future developments at Sajmište will be for naught.

### **Recommendations for Further Study**

In this study, several aspects of Sajmište's history, legacy in public memory, and the surrounding political environment are mentioned in passing. This is due to time constraints and other limitations and their analysis is necessary in a complete study.

One overlooked area of Sajmište's role in public memory stems from its inception as Belgrade's original fairground. This phase of Sajmište's history is historically, architecturally, culturally significant. For some in Serbia, Sajmište's original function remains the most significant and they would like to see this memory incorporated as a large part of the official narrative. The fact that Sajmište was the first part of Belgrade constructed on the left bank of the Sava River is a very important part of Sajmište's legacy. Accordingly so, many architects and urban planners understand this phase of Sajmište's history to be the most central, but for different reasons. For Vukoti Lazar and oki ,

The importance of the Old Belgrade Fairground for the urban history of Belgrade is not its architectural excellence, but emancipating efforts and potentials of the society that were represented through the building process.<sup>124</sup>

Since the plan was developed through a public competition and publicly financed, Vukoti Lazar and oki claim that it bolstered the public's confidence in the state. In addition, the complex was designed in the modernist style and was to be the first of such complexes in a period of modernization. Yugoslavia was to modernize, and in the process present itself to the international community as a new, touristic locale.<sup>125</sup> This aspect of Sajmište's legacy deserves additional research and analysis.

Another interesting aspect of Sajmište's legacy involves the Town Planning Institute of Belgrade. In 2008, the Institute celebrated its sixty year anniversary. To mark this occasion, the Institute sponsored several workshops at Sajmište to discuss the future of the site. They titled the exhibition "The Old Belgrade Fairground as the Old New Belgrade Core," after the main multimedia project. After the exhibition's completion, the Institute published a brochure overviewing the workshops and their results. The published brochure came with an introduction by the Institute's general manager, Antonije Anti . In it, he describes Sajmište as a "space of the great cultural-historic significance, equally from the point of view and in the context of New Belgrade's urban tissue formation and of the central City zone, riversides and Belgrade as a whole."<sup>126</sup> He closes his introduction with the following proclamation:

In the year of its Jubilee, Town Planning Institute is supporting with great pleasure the activities on popularization and promotion of the Old Fairground as a space with significant potential to contribute to the uniqueness of Belgrade, more so if we have in mind the exceptional accessibility of the location.<sup>127</sup>

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<sup>124</sup> Vukoti Lazar and oki , "Complex History as a Source of Planning Problems: Old Belgrade Fairground": 3.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid.

<sup>126</sup> Town Planning Institute of Belgrade, *The Old Belgrade Fairground as the Old New Belgrade Core* (Belgrade, Serbia: 2008), 5.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid.

His introduction reveals how big of a role Sajmište's economic potential played in organizing the exhibition. This aspect of Sajmište is difficult to ignore and presumably has a large impact on any decision regarding the site. The exact size of that role should to be researched and analyzed.

Milan Nedić's name has appeared several times in this study, as he and his regime are strongly linked to topics involving Sajmište's legacy in public memory. Since the beginning of the Milošević era in Serbia, there has been an increasing apologetic trend towards Nedić, his regime, and other Serbian collaborationists. At several points during my research, Milan Nedić was described by the epithet the 'Serbian mother'. This is in reference to the thousands of Serbs living outside of the wartime borders who found refuge in Nedić's Serbia. Understanding how his legacy changed from being declared a domestic traitor, to described in school textbooks as a controversial figure, to the 'Serbian mother' would add depth to this study and is an important research topic in its own right.

The legacy of Topovske Šupe in Serbian public memory is not discussed in this research paper. It is a significant historical site in terms of the Holocaust in Serbia. In October 1994, the Serbian government erected a memorial to the Jewish victims of Topovske Šupe. However, it was affixed to the wrong building – Tramvajске Šupe. It took 12 years for someone to realize the mistake and for the plaque to be affixed to the correct building. Understanding the “the continuity of unawareness and ignorance about this place of the Holocaust” would make for a fascinating and needed study.<sup>128</sup>

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<sup>128</sup> Byford, “When I Say ‘The Holocaust’, I Mean ‘Jasenovac’”: 52.

## Appendix A- Pronunciation Guide

In this study, the original Serbo-Croatian Latin orthography is preserved for names, places, and terms. As previously mentioned the sole exception is the use of Belgrade as opposed to the native Beograd. A pronunciation guide is necessary to aid in the reading of this study. Most Serbo-Croatian consonants are pronounced as they would be in English. The graphemes ‘b’, ‘d’, ‘f’, ‘k’, ‘l’, ‘m’, ‘n’, ‘p’, ‘s’, ‘t’, and ‘v’, represent the phonemes /b/, /d/, /f/, /k/, /l/, /m/, /n/, /p/, /s/, /t/, and /v/ respectively. The grapheme ‘c’ represents the phoneme /ts/ as in **cats**. The grapheme ‘g’ always represents the phoneme /g/, known as ‘hard g’, as in **grape** and never in **giant**, known as ‘soft g’. The graphemes ‘ć’ and ‘č’ represent /tʃ/ and /tʃ/ respectively. In terms of English transliteration, these are both pronounced like the initial consonant in **church**. The grapheme ‘đž’ is considered one letter, which represents the ‘soft g’ or /dʒ/ as in **giant**. The grapheme ‘đ’ or in its majuscule form, ‘Đ’, represents /dʒ/, which for nonnative speakers is pronounced identically to ‘đž’. The grapheme ‘h’ represents the phoneme /x/ as in the Scottish pronunciation of **loch**. The grapheme ‘j’ represents the phoneme /j/, which is always pronounced like **youth** and never like **juice**. The grapheme ‘lj’ is considered to be one letter, and is

pronounced as /r/. This phoneme does not exist in English, but it is similar to the second consonant in the word *million*. The grapheme 'nj' is considered to be one letter, and is pronounced as /nj/ which is pronounced like the second consonant in *canyon*. The grapheme 'r' represents the phoneme /r/, known as the 'rolling r'. This phoneme does not exist in English. The grapheme 'š' represents the phoneme /s/ as in *ship*. The grapheme 'ž' represents the phoneme /z/ as in the second consonant in *measure*. The Serbo-Croatian vowels 'a', 'e', 'i', 'o', and 'u' are all continental vowels. That is, they are considered to be the pure vowel sounds found in liturgical Latin or modern Italian.

## **Appendix B - Interview Questions**

What is your occupation?

What is your connection in Sajmište?

How did you first become involved with Sajmište?

What caused this interest?

How did you first learn about Sajmište?

What role did Sajmište play in your primary and secondary education?

What is the most important phase of Sajmište's history?

Do you remember learning about the Holocaust?

Why do you think Banjica and Jajinci received more attention in Yugoslavia?

In what ways did Milošević's regime affect Sajmište's memory?

What is your opinion on the current state of Sajmište?

If it were up to you, what would you like to see done at Sajmište?

Are people aware of Sajmište's history?

Do you believe this topic is connected with the Yugoslav Wars?

Is there anyone else you would recommend I interview?

If necessary, can I contact you again for any follow-up questions or clarifications?



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