

AN INVITATION

"If humans were truly loving they would always be able to turn the other cheek but would in fact find no occasion for doing so."

-Kenneth Waltz, *Man the State and War*¹

In his theoretical analysis of humankind and war, social scientist Kenneth Waltz notes that people are neither perfectly rational nor truly loving, which is a recurrent thought and shared conclusion in Saint Augustine's, Baruch Spinoza's, Reinhold Niebuhr's and Hans J. Morgenthau's writings on just wars and war crimes, each contemplating the notion that political problems stem from our inherent potential for a binary evil and good.² Does behavior like stealing, rape, massacre in Srebrenica prove that Man is bad? What about things that point toward goodness, such as charity, love, self-sacrifice and forgiveness? Can good be radical, as proposed by political theorist Hannah Arendt?³ Why that people got on very well for decades in what was Yugoslavia, then in an apparent rush of anger they did not? If this dual nature is fixed in us as human beings, what can we do to achieve peace? This final question has been the central preoccupation of International Relations experts. Since Bill Clinton's administration promoted "the democratic peace thesis"⁴, a theory that enhancing liberal democracy would usher in a universal peace, changing administrations in the United States controversially have intervened in Bosnia, Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya and Syria. Underlying this set of historical actions, interventionist political parties have sought justification in an arc toward utopia. If these conflicts lie less in the nature of people or even their State apparatus, perhaps they stem from social activity. Conflicts can be seen as a side effect of competition and cooperation where, unfortunately, games and rituals can be overtaken by lethal terror. An investigation of this shift from competition to outright hostility could inform debate around why mass atrocities and societal trauma still happen.

Following the breakup of Yugoslavia in 1991 into six republics, bitter political, national, and ethnic divisions plagued the region and led to a series of wars for independence. Among the most brutal and destructive conflicts was The Bosnian War, which ravaged Bosnia and Herzegovina from 1992 to 1995. Most notable was the mass killing of over 8,000 Bosniak men and boys in and around the town of Srebrenica. The genocide, which began on July 11, 1995 and lasted eleven days, resulted in the complete annihilation of all male members of entire families. In their memory, every year between 2006 and 2020, artist Aida Šehović marked the July 11 anniversary of the genocide with an annual "nomadic monument" entitled *ŠTO TE NEMA* ("where have you been" in Bosnian) in partnership with Bosnian diaspora communities in public squares around the world. In each city, the public was invited to participate in the creation of the monument by placing fildžani (small porcelain coffee cups) on the ground and filling them with coffee prepared on site throughout the day. The coffee remained in the cups in memory of the victims. In 2020, the final iteration of the *ŠTO TE NEMA* ritual took place in the Memorial Center Srebrenica-Potočari. For Šehović, its occurrence in Srebrenica was a logical and fitting place to declare the end of the annual event.

This exhibition focuses on the *ŠTO TE NEMA* archive, consisting of posters announcing each of the fifteen iterations of the anniversary ritual from 2006 to 2020 as well as a collection of more than 8,372 fildžani. The number of the cups in the collection is meant to match the number of known Srebrenica victims, although the exact number of people killed may never be clear, as the process of identifying the dead is ongoing. The design for *ŠTO TE NEMA (Spatium Memoriae)*, 2006-2021, is a reference to the shelving systems used by forensic teams to store, label and identify human remains discovered in mass graves across Bosnia and Herzegovina to this day. The artwork, as presented for fifteen years, was an exploration of how history and memory are represented in public space in real time. Now in a more static, archival form mimicking an architecture used by archivists and created for analysis and organization, Šehović moves the emphasis from reconstruction to preservation. Šehović's ongoing commitment to the presentation of these objects also reveals how individuals who have survived mass atrocities and genocide can be empowered to shape public memory by taking control of their own stories, as her project demonstrates her ability to shape communal memory.

Also part of the archive and exhibition is *Family Album (ŠTO TE NEMA)*, a series of photographs that replicate a selection of the office walls from the Women of Srebrenica Association in Tuzla, Bosnia & Herzegovina, a grassroots organization founded by the families of Srebrenica genocide victims, with whom Šehović has worked with since 2006. Staged there is a collection of the names and photos of those who were killed, and those who remain missing. Portraits and documents are presented on the walls of the association's office, serving as a living archive for families of survivors. By systematically documenting each of the walls in their space, Šehović has recreated part of the physical environment where these women tirelessly conduct their work. Her documentary copy is in itself a monument to the victims and a tribute to the group's ongoing mission. Šehović's replication of these images is a visual and experiential affirmation. Presented as a multi-dimensional photographic installation, *Family Album* also addresses scale and gravity, using portraiture, remaining a document to communicate a collective gesture and the strength of community. The work explores ideas around presence and absence as well as multi-generational trauma, while reassuring survivors and viewers that these atrocities will not be forgotten.

In Bosnia and Herzegovina, as in many places, an invitation for a coffee is a spark for social interaction. The perfection of tea, coffee and their related rituals span the globe from Brazil, Indonesia, Italy, France and Japan. From the hipster café to the local Starbucks, the conviviality of the hot drink is both a universal and specific, subjective experience. Furthermore, an invitation for a coffee is an invitation for a conversation. Coffee can provide a metaphor for both similarities and differences

between people and regions, even if only a few miles away. Podgorica, Montenegro, until recently also a province of Serbia, is just 205 miles from Sarajevo, populated by Muslims speaking the same language as Bosnians. But, as it turns out, coffee there is prepared differently, while the sentiment of connecting with friends or family over coffee is the same.

Sarajevo claims the first European café, founded in 1534. It illustrates the cultural influences and chain reactions through history, even surviving the conflicts between Ottomans and the Austro-Hungarian Empire, including the introduction of the caffeinated discussions among fashionable café society during the Enlightenment era in Paris and London. The society that revolved around these establishments spawned by turn, revolution among bourgeois French Republicans and launching insurance giants like Lloyds, itself originating in a coffee house in 1688. By extension the mass commercialization of brands like Starbucks in the United States fold into this pattern of cafés mirroring the times. Coffee is in many ways the drink of the modern era. In his book *The Lexus and the Olive Tree*, economist and *New York Times* writer, Thomas Friedman presented his "Golden Arches Theory of Conflict Prevention," essentially stating that countries with a McDonalds franchise don't go to war against each other, by having a middle class strong enough to support its integrated network and promote effective conflict resolution.⁵ Equally, it can be shown that nations with a Starbucks franchise tend to live in peace with each other. The skinny mocha fusion of capitalism and liberal democracy, brewed as a standardized beverage. Coffee is a commodity likely brought to the wider Balkan area by the Ottomans from outposts in the Red Sea where their traders interacted with Ethiopians and Somalis who were drinking beverages derived from this bean. It is truly a global commodity.

During a very recent research trip to Oxford, England, I set out to find Queens Lane Coffee House, opened in 1654 and considered to be the first café in the English-speaking world, although this is disputed.⁶ It is still a café today. The original proprietor, a Syrian-Jewish migrant (succeeded today by a Turkish migrant), opened his shop facing the famous High Street, opposite the examination halls of Oxford University. Its clientele at the time, inevitably linked to many important discoveries in science, math and politics, reportedly extended their discussions and conversations there. The students and professors must have been amused at this novelty and kept it viable for centuries. While causation can't be proven, this period coincides with the foundation of modern public museums, including the university's Ashmolean Museum founded in 1683. It has a lovely café, a must-have feature for all museums today. Sadly, at the time of my visit, Queens Lane Coffee House was temporarily closed for the first time in nearly five hundred years, owing to Covid. The pandemic had interrupted a longstanding tradition.

The daily ritual of sharing coffee with loved ones is an important cultural and familial practice in the Balkan region. Šehović's project is, in a way, a celebration of her cultural heritage. The work also points to a number of universal experiences that she hopes can bring people together to further discussions that may prevent future atrocities and also inspire her plans for what the future of a more permanent *ŠTO TE NEMA* monument could be. Using her unique approach to socially-engaged artistic practice, Šehović worked with the local communities to produce each iteration of the permanent and the current archival installation, inviting participants to take the time needed to pour a cup of traditional Bosnian style coffee to pay tribute, while also coming together to connect with one another. The installation as a public artwork, revealed how the act of recovery can be experienced on both a personal and universal scale. The project also pushed and questioned the formal aspects of traditional monuments, suggesting that future monuments should be a collaboration with and within communities.

This exhibition connects to a significant population of first and second generation Bosnians in the area. St. Louis is home to the largest population of Bosnian immigrants in the United States, and this community has had a major impact on the broader fabric of the region's cultural life. While historical and specific to the conflict in the Balkans, Šehović's exhibition also explores the universal themes of identity and displacement as well as meditations on collective remembrance, community resilience, and healing. With hope, a coffee can be an invitation, to promote our similarities and not our differences, and ultimately, possibly be symbols of common humanity.

Politically-influential theologian Niebuhr framed the modern theories of just war and humanitarian interventionism that dominated the last thirty years of foreign policy. He happened to be based in St. Louis, just up the road from Laumeier Sculpture Park as a professor of Theology at Union Theological Seminary in Webster Groves. The rationale for American intervention in the Yugoslavian War was strongly informed by Niebuhr's theories, embraced and implemented with controversial results by the last five U.S. presidents. The Bosnian community in St. Louis was directly resettled as a result of United States humanitarian intervention in the 1990s. In this case, the results have been a success. Acute suffering in Sarajevo and more widely in Bosnia was stopped even though assistance to the people of Srebrenica failed to arrive. Survivors and refugees from the conflict zone found a new home and St. Louisans break bread or sip coffee with new neighbors. Šehović's coffee cups memorializing the most alarming atrocity in this conflict has found appropriate geographical placement in Sunset Hills, near to the very place that Niebuhr conceived of using foreign policy to resolve the failures of men, the inadequacy of the state and the failure of imagination that war represents.

Dana Turkovic, Curator

1. Waltz, Kenneth N. *Man, the State and War: A Theoretical Analysis* (Columbia University Press, 2018) p. 2.

2. Ibid. p.10. Further suggested reading: St. Augustine's *The City of God*; Spinoza's *Theological Political Treatise*; Niebuhr's *Moral Man and Immoral Society* and Morgenthau's *Politics among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace*.

3. Amos Elon noted in his work, *The Excommunication of Hannah Arendt*, the introduction to "Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil Arendt", that Arendt insisted that only good had any depth. Good can be radical; evil can never be radical, it can only be extreme, for it possesses neither depth nor any demonic dimension yet — and this is its horror! — It can spread like a fungus over the surface of the earth and lay waste the entire world. radioopensource.org/hannah-arendt-and-the-banality-of-evil/, accessed 8/25/21.

4. The Democratic Peace Thesis holds that democracies rarely make war on other democracies. Political scientists have advanced numerous theories attempting to identify precisely which elements of democracy promote this mutual peace, with the hope that Democratic Peace could be the final and ultimate antidote to war.

5. Friedman, Thomas; *The Lexus and the Olive Tree: Understanding Globalization* (Picador, 2012) p. 249.

6. In London, the first one was opened later that same year in at St Michael's Alley, Cornhill, by an eccentric Greek named Pasqua Roseć. Soon they were commonplace, especially in the aftermath of the English Civil War (1642-1651). [https:// www.historic-uk.com/CultureUK/English-Coffeehouses-Penny-Universities](https://www.historic-uk.com/CultureUK/English-Coffeehouses-Penny-Universities), accessed 8/26/21.

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Below: Aida Šehović, ŠTO TE NEMA nomadic monument on July 11, 2020 in Potočari/Srebrenica, Bosnia and Herzegovina. Photo: Paul Lowe © Aida Šehović. All rights reserved.

ARTIST BIOGRAPHY

Aida Šehović (born 1977) Banja Luka, Bosnia and Herzegovina. Šehović earned her BA from the University of Vermont in 2002 and her MFA from Hunter College in 2010. Ongoing since 2006, her project ŠTO TE NEMA has travelled internationally to cities such as Sarajevo, Zurich, Venice, Istanbul, Toronto, Chicago, Boston and the UN Headquarters. Her work has been exhibited extensively, including at Canadian Museum of Human Rights, Winnipeg; Palazzo Dandolo Paolucci, Venice; Socrates Sculpture Park, and Queens Museum, New York City. She received the ArtsLink Award in 2006, the Jacob K. Javits Fellowship in 2007 and the Emerging Artist Fellowship from Socrates Sculpture Park in 2013. Šehović lives and works in New York City.

