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## **The Sarajevo Ghetto Spectacle: Historical Trajectories of the Yugoslav Visual Arts Community during the Siege of Sarajevo**

A result of the violently abrupt conflicts that dominated southeastern Europe at the end of the twentieth century, the four-year siege of Sarajevo (1992-1995) disproportionately targeted the local civilian population and forced them to adapt to extreme shortages, constant mortar explosions and indiscriminate sniper attacks, deeply affecting and permanently reconfiguring the city's social landscape. Part of a rocky transition from socialist republic to independent nation-state, the tangible introduction of wartime conditions was also accompanied by a major cultural shift, as former Yugoslavs suddenly found themselves citizen of a nonexistent country. However, little is still known as to how Sarajevans and their contemporaries actually experienced this transition, with the majority of academic attention devoted to understanding the appearance of new Yugoslav borders instead of the disappearance of a Yugoslav cultural community, and often accompanied by a central question: how can historians discuss societal changes that are simultaneously completely abstract and yet inherently subjective?

This dissertation attempts to address this question, focusing on the wartime activities of Sarajevan visual artists in the period leading up to, during, and directly following the siege of the city. Instead of focusing directly on the inhabitants' experiences of wartime struggles, this text mobilizes a series of discourses based on popular concepts such as those of civilization, culture and resistance which became popular vectors of expression for the local population. Over time, the introduction of such ideals into the public forum by political and cultural elites resulted in the establishment of an image of the siege as a collective struggle of a civilized city whose European heritage was being consciously targeting from the surrounding hills. This dissertation aims to highlight and mobilize these popular discourses in order to better understand how the city's inhabitants understood and navigated their positions as victims and actors throughout this conflict, placing individual siege-time experiences into the foreground of Bosnian cultural history. This is done through focusing on one highly specific group involved with their spread: the city's visual artists.

Walking the line between art- and social history, this dissertation is based on an extensive review of archival materials available in public and private archives, coupled with the introduction of visual sources such as photographs and videos of exhibitions. Accordingly, it also bypasses traditional reliance on interviews common in these two fields, particularly in post-conflict areas. Mobilizing a micro-historical approach, this project follows the role of abstract concepts in cultural shifts without resorting to vague

generalizations using local artists as an anchor, a group particularly suited for the task thanks to their relative public visibility coupled with demographic diversity. Having hosted an estimated 250 exhibitions and supported by roughly 300 individuals, the artistic community in question provided avenues for expression in a time of crisis and reconfigured spaces of socialization for the local population, but also offered their own artistic contribution to the debates shaping the siege-time sociopolitical landscape. How did artists change the way they discuss their work and community leading up to and throughout the conflict? How did they react to the evolving militarization of society? How did the specific urban nature of the conflict reorganize real and imagined spatial divisions? In what ways did they interact with foreign cultural producers? Through analyzing not only the artworks created and exhibitions organized but their creator's experiences and their attitudes towards the situation in which they found themselves, this project hereby proposes a fresh approach into studying the everyday experiences of the siege of Sarajevo, beginning with the *Jugoslovenska Dokumenta* (1989).