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“Some people compare me with Anne Frank. That frightens me, Mimmy. I don’t want to suffer her fate”.

– Zlata Filipović, *Zlata’s Diary: A Child’s Life in Sarajevo*.

An Emancipatory Paradigm for Participatory Research on Wartime Childhood. War Childhood Museum in Sarajevo Case Study

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Abstract

The article addresses the issue of using the emancipatory-participatory paradigm in the process of reconstructing the experience of wartime childhood, that is, experiencing formative years in the circumstances of armed conflict. Adopting the specific idiographic case of the Museum of Wartime Childhood in Sarajevo, the author analyzes the local socio-cultural context, methodological assumptions, as well as forms of realization of the mission of the Museum of Wartime Childhood in Sarajevo, which is to legitimize the narratives of those whose voices remain marginalized in the generalized memetic discourse. Such oriented research and educational activities are part of the characteristics of emancipatory and advocacy approaches to participatory research, the specificity of which is also the subject of the analyses of these reflections.

Keywords: wartime childhood, Sarajevo, emancipatory paradigm, participatory research, memoirism.

Introduction

Sarajevo, the capital of Bosnia and Herzegovina, nicknamed the European Jerusalem, was founded in the 15th century and from its beginnings, functioned as a unique example of a multicultural melting pot where different faiths, ethnicities, and life philosophies found their refuge. It was in this city that the followers of the four denominations – Sunni Islam, Orthodox Christianity, Catholicism, and Judaism – lived dynamically yet harmoniously for hundreds of years.

As the capital of Bosnia and Herzegovina (one of the six former republics of the Federation of Yugoslavia) after World War II it became a symbol of the new socialist order introduced by Josip Broz-Tito, embodying the idea of multicultural *bratstvo i jedinstvo* (brotherhood and unity). After his death in May 1980, the country plunged into a national, political, and economic crisis – nationalistic and ethnic tensions grew, and in 1992 three of the six republics that made up Yugoslavia unilaterally declared independence after earlier referendums – the Republics of Croatia and Slovenia (June 25), the Republic of Macedonia (September 17), and on March 3, 1992, the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina. The consequences of declaring autonomy were devastating for Bosnia. The Republic of Serbia strongly condemned BiH's declarations of independence, questioning the security of the approximately 600,000 Serbs living in the republic. Fierce combat broke out in the country in early 1992. More than 200,000 people are estimated to have died in the civil war in Bosnia and Herzegovina (including 1,601 children in Sarajevo), and more than half of the Bosnian population became refugees (UNHCR, 2012). Under these circumstances, Sarajevo became the arena of the siege by the forces of Republika Srpska and the Yugoslav People's Army that lasted from April 5, 1992, to February 29, 1996 – the longest and bloodiest siege in European history after World War II.

Under the historical and geopolitical circumstances outlined above, for several years of the early 1990s, thousands of children from Bosnian, Croatian, but also Serbian ethnicities, as well as ethnically religious mixed families

lived out their formative years of childhood and adolescence under the conditions of wartime carnage.

As Jasminko Halilović writes in the book *War Childhood*, “according to my estimates, there were about 70,000 children under the age of 18 in Sarajevo during the war” (2018, p. 13). The wartime biographical experiences of this generation remained silent for years. There have been historical, political, and sociological studies reconstructing the experience of the war in Bosnia, but none of them echoed the narrative of a child – experiencing the atrocities of warfare to the same extent as the adults involved. Considered as seemingly passive observers on a psychological, social as well and educational level, they built their biographies embedded in a laminal non-being. A dozen years after the end of hostilities, one of the participants of these events, Sarajevo resident, Halilović (born in 1988) in June 2010 asked via the Internet those who spent part of their childhood in Sarajevo during the war to send him a short memoir (160 characters) – an answer to the question “what was a war childhood for you?”. In a short time, he received more than 1,500 memories from people scattered all over the world. The aftermath of this initiative was the book “*War Childhood*”¹ (2015; 2018) which became the first publication dealing with the collective experience of growing up during the war in Sarajevo with such a large scope. After two years of work, 1,030 short messages found their place in a mosaic that attempted to tell the story of (his) generation. In search of symmetry, Halilović came up with an algorithm for arranging the memories, reaching to maintain a balance between the key emotions and the most common themes. In 2017 the book gave rise to an initiative to create a War Childhood Museum (awarded the 2018 Council of Europe Museum Prize a year after), which, as the monograph that pre-

¹ The book consists of three parts, forming a coherent and extremely moving story about the autobiographical experience of armed conflict from a child’s perspective. The first part introduces the cultural complexity of Bosnia and Herzegovina, revealing the rich historical and cultural experience of the country’s capital, Sarajevo. It also introduces the reader to the war history of the author, who was a few years old child at the time of the siege of Sarajevo. The second, main chapter contains autobiographical recollections of 1,030 people, part of whose childhood fell during the 1992–1995 war in Bosnia and Herzegovina. This part answers one question “What is a war childhood for you?”. The third part of the book is devoted to the War Childhood Museum, explains its concept, and allows the reader to get acquainted with pieces of the Museum’s collection (Halilović, 2015).

ceded it, is part of a broader discourse of childhood studies that is participatory and emancipatory in its orientation toward the youngest witnesses (and victims) of armed conflicts.

The exhibition at the War Childhood Museum presents war, specifically the 1990s Bosnian war and the recent armed conflicts in Syria² and Ukraine. Moreover, the Museum worked with a research group based in Gaza to document the experiences of children and youth that embrace several stories and objects that provide an insight into children's experiences and daily lives under the blockade. In June 2020, the War childhood Museum opened its first international office in Kyiv and is currently working in several cities around the country to document the experiences of children affected by war in Ukraine.

The purpose of this article is two-fold. Firstly, to introduce the local socio-cultural context and origins of the War Childhood project. Secondly, to share the philosophy (mission and vision) as well as the forms of methodological implementation of the War Childhood Museum in Sarajevo, which stands alone as a unique example of practices of empowerment of children's narratives within the emancipatory paradigm of participation. Emancipatory and participatory research are approaches that prioritize the active involvement of individuals or communities in the research process, yet having distinct emphases and methodologies analyzed in these reflections.

Socio-cultural idiosyncrasies of Sarajevo

At this point, it is crucial to emphasize not only the inclusive nature of the activities of the War Childhood Museum but also the entire context of Sarajevo's local culture, the characteristics of which are part of the broader dynamics of intercultural dialogue. The latter, legitimizing the voices of all actors of social life in this geopolitical and cultural universe, reflects what is referred to in the local language as *suživot* – known throughout the former Yugoslavia as a traditional way of establishing social contacts despite cultural

² Together with partnering organizations Basmeh & Zeitooneh, SadalSuud Foundation, From Syria with Love, and Sawa Foundation the Museum is working to produce an exhibition on the experiences of Syrian child refugees living in Lebanon.

(confessional, ethnic) differences, and was most characteristic of Bosnia and Sarajevo, due to the ethno-religious diversity of the city. It is linked to other local practices such as *poštenje* (honesty or decency), *merhamet* (humanitarian charity), *gostoprinstvo* (hospitality), or *komšiluk* (neighbourly relations), according to which everyone must treat others according to the golden rule of mutual respect (Kolind, 2008). Sarajevo in its history has given numerous testimonies of empowering cultural differences in a dynamic borderland based on cross-cultural interaction that led to the establishment of a culturally diverse community through everyday interpersonal interactions. The War Childhood Museum initiative came to life under similar ambiance and circumstances. Building on the grassroots constructivist legitimization of voices representing cultural diversity, Halilović and his team established an institution that comes across as a manifestation of practices that emancipate from the dictates of the mainstream, culturally exclusive political atmosphere that imposes the dominant, ethno-national narrative. For months, a small team including anthropologists, historians, and psychologists devised what such a museum should look like (and how to raise funds). The first to go into the collection were a few items donated by the people whose memories were included in the book. As Halilović says, “the museum seemed like a natural continuation of the book. From the beginning, the most important thing in both projects was the trust we were blessed with. Our team also comprises ‘war children’ – hence people felt that we were competent to deal with this topic. I think it was also the integrity and consistency of our work that let us gain their trust” (from a conversation with Halilović, summer 2019).

In 2015, Halilović’s team announced the plan to establish the museum – through traditional and social media, they publicized that they were collecting objects related to growing up during the war. For more than 20 years since the end of the war, in the Bosnian public sphere there was no place (nor political atmosphere) that allowed survivors to talk about their experiences, hence the idea for a space where people would feel safe and confident that their stories would not be used inappropriately, or their voices perverted. From the beginning of the project, Halilović’s team indicated they wanted to remain politically neutral, not supporting any ethno-nationalist narrative. Being interested in documenting the stories of people who experienced war as children regardless of the political stance, it made the whole process challenging

in finding permanent housing and funding. It turned out that the local community was hugely in favor of the whole idea, contrary to the local authorities still immersed in the ethno-nationalist, particular interests. During the search for a permanent site and funds, voices of support were received from common and well-known people – there were open letters as well as social media campaigns, so the idea became widely known and acknowledged as a manifesto of widespread support and recognition of the need for such an initiative. It also revealed the participatory, grass-root nature of the project from the initial stage.

Emancipation as the key attribute of the War Childhood Museum paradigm

In educational discourse – particularly in special needs education and empowerment of persons with disabilities – emancipation is referred to as “rendering oneself independent, freeing oneself from various kinds of dependence, oppression, fear, achieving independence, liberation” (Czerepaniak-Walczak, 2006, pp. 27–29). Questioning the traditional, top-down, nomothetic, and positivist forms of social science research, and informed by (among others) critical theory (Douglas, 2005), postcolonial discourses, feminist theories, as well as race-specific theories and neo-Marxist theories emancipatory paradigm is focused on liberation and transformation of various communities through group activity (Armstrong & McMahan, 2013; Mertens, 2017), employing participatory and collaborative ways of data gathering, analysis, and interpretation.

The critical-emancipatory approach to the psychological, political as well and social aspects of armed conflict refers to the preconceptions of representatives of the Frankfurt School, which is the starting point for the critical-emancipatory paradigm (Kellner, 2003). James and Prout (1997) implies that almost all political, educational, and societal processes have an overwhelming impact on children, while, in turn, children have little or no influence to manage them or become active actors in social change (p. 30). On the other hand, recent years have witnessed a revival of advocacy for addressing children’s need for a sense of agency and participation in creating the sociocultural reality constructively, challenging the views of childhood and adoles-

cence as a pre-determined period (Jarosz, 2017). War Childhood Museum in Sarajevo provides an example for such a new narrative. In terms of the paradigmatic underpinning, it is oriented at expanding the community of collective experience, valuing the competence of children reliving their childhood, and as experts of their own lives additionally empowering the autobiographical functions of narrative and the habituation of wartime. Last but not least, it gives rise to the recognition of the child as a real subject and part of the social life.

Since emancipation “[...] includes the liberation of a person, his/her mentality, as well as the related sphere of social behaviour” (Zielińska-Kostyło, 2004, pp. 368–369) the War Childhood Museum in Sarajevo frees children’s voice from the dominant, adult narrative of war, providing participatory circumstances for articulation of their perspective of the world, i.e., wide array of values, meanings and experiences constituting this aspect of their lives.

The project of reconstructing a wartime childhood, initially through a monograph and then a museum facility, as well as the extensive research and educational activities taking place there and in branches worldwide (Gaza, Syria, Lebanon, Ukraine), fits into the essence of the participatory discourse and emancipatory paradigm, as it values and legitimizes the narratives of the child, reconstructing the image of childhood and its social context from the perspective of children’s experiences and their co-creation of knowledge. As the museum is dedicated to the memory of children whose childhood occurred during the war, the retrospective collection includes diaries, toys, photos, clothing, and other personal items donated to the institution by survivors of the 1992–1995 civil war and the siege of Sarajevo. Visitors can also listen to the recorded interviews and memoirs. Such narratives or stories create circumstances for the individual (as well as collective) liberation from biographical oppression stemming from experiencing the formative years of childhood and adolescence under conditions of armed conflict that hinders unobstructed (by external conditions), free bio-psycho-social development of the child, as well as his/her sense of agency.

The museum displays a collection of written and video testimonies paired with artifacts, telling the story of children denied agency during the war. It “helps individuals overcome past traumatic experiences and prevent traumatization of others, and at the same time advance mutual understanding at

the collective level to enhance personal and social development” (Halilović, WCM website). It challenges the stance of understanding children outside the cultural context and considering them developmentally “predictable”, diminishing their role in the societal realm. The mission of the Museum conjointly questions the essentialist epistemological assumptions of constructing objective knowledge about childhood and the “dogma” of constructing knowledge by adults exclusively (Hogan, 2005).

Emancipatory research aims to empower marginalized or oppressed groups by giving them control over the research process and enabling them to articulate their own realities and experiences, challenging existing power structures and hierarchies that contribute to the marginalization of certain groups (such as children in the context of an armed conflict). Hence, emancipatory research often seeks not only to produce knowledge but also to catalyze social change and promote justice and equity. Oliver (1992) explains: “the emancipatory paradigm, as the name implies, is about the facilitating of a politics of the possible by confronting social oppression at whatever levels it occurs” (p. 110). Here, we might ponder what sort of oppression we deal with and what level it is. War as such is a challenging topic for art exhibitions and museum presentations, not to mention the perspective of children in armed conflicts. If there is a public narrative concerning the war, it mostly represents and empowers the majority voice of the dominant, political discourse and particular interests of a given ethnic or national group. Oliver furtherly implies, “the issue then for the emancipatory research paradigm is not how to empower people but, once people have decided to empower themselves, precisely what research can then do to facilitate this process” (Oliver, 1992, p. 111). By presenting the children’s testimonies and through their remembrance of personal experiences as survivors (through a series of personal objects and testimonies, i.e. storytelling) their emotional memories are liberated from the imposed political interpretation of the past at the psychological level, individually and collectively. Once they become involved in the process of meaning-making and processing their war childhood, they co-create the conditions for a sense of agency towards their own experience.

By meeting the needs of the marginalized or disadvantaged groups (MacKenzie & Knipe, 2006) emancipatory paradigm creates opportunities to empower the voices of those who usually remain unheard. Acknowledging the

fact that knowledge is socially constructed and the local (cultural, social, political) context in understanding research findings is of key importance (Mertens, 2007) it provides a holistic perspective that produces a thick description of complex social experiences and phenomena related to, for instance, growing up under the circumstances of an armed conflict.

The above becomes particularly important for capturing the specificity of experiencing the life of a child immersed in the political narratives of adults. In the emancipatory approach, it is equally relevant to provide a description of the world and the phenomena occurring within, the detailed ways of operating in the world, as well as deciphering the meanings attributed to the objects of the physical and social world through the process of meaning-making (such as war childhood). Given the above, we might assume such orientation represents positive emancipation (emancipation “to”), as it enables a retrospective insight into the experiences of wartime childhood that provides a sense of agency, a sense of empowerment, meaning, and transgression (of own fate and external circumstances). Freedom “from” on the other hand, in such a stance has three essential elements. It concerns the marginalization and exclusion of children’s war narratives in terms of their everyday life environment (territorial-social space), their conception of the life world (internal and interpersonal experiences), and the social dimension, i.e., the meanings given to social situations, though description of individual and collective experience. Additionally, in the context of current political discourse in Bosnia-Herzegovina, the philosophy of the War Childhood Museum works against the “mainstream” ethnic and nationalistic divisions, unifying (and equalizing) the children’s experiences to the collective concept of “being a child”, challenging the political status quo (Takševa, 2018).

Methodological characteristic

The aforesaid methodological perception of the status and role of children in their meaning-making process of life experiences throws light on how they perceive their situation and the problems affecting them. It acknowledges them as active subjects, constructing and defining their social lives, the lives of other people, and the communities in which they are embedded. Hence, the methodological orientation of the War Childhood Museum in Saraje-

vo situates the activities of the institution in an emancipatory discourse of participatory engagement, fitting into the constructivist optics, in which the world of the child is a social construct (Kehily, 2004). Since social constructivism considers childhood within the framework of social reality, in which children independently create meanings in interactions with others (Jenks, 2008, pp. 126–127), they act as active subjects who co-perform research – as partners in the construction of knowledge on childhood.

Those participants who have been providing their stories act as co-researchers. They are the driving force for the investigation, and the key element of building the narratives. It also situates them as joint contributors and investigators to the findings, encouraging engagement in nascent forms of reflexivity through self-reflection, meaning-making, and the processing of their traumatic experiences (Violi, 2012). By making their voices the key content of the research design, such a methodological approach validates and privileges their experiences, challenging at the same time, forms of knowledge that are imbued with relations of power and control (over the dominant narrative). It provides the sense of an empowering outlook on war from the personal perspective of those who have experienced it as children. Thus, one can speak of the collectivization of childhood as a fundamental perspective of childhood research. Nonetheless, this does not exclude the study of individual cases of children representing these groups or populations, as each voice is articulated and acknowledged equally important. Moreover, favoring qualitative and interpretive forms of inquiry, the War Childhood Museum methods are responsive (psychologically) to the needs of those who participate in the data collection.

Ontologically, treating childhood as a social phenomenon (a socio-cultural construct) embedded in the specific social context of a given culture, empowers the recognition of childhood (and children) as an actual part of society and culture, rather than a precursor or “social vestibule”: “children, in this sense, are the actual social structure that makes up society, they are already within, not preparing to become members” (Jarosz, 2017, p. 63). Considering such a stance, the War Childhood Museum in Sarajevo empowers children’s perception of the reality as equally valid to the one of adults, whereas oral history as a qualitative research method is used to collect first-hand and personal narratives of a certain event (childhood lived during war) (Richie, 2014).

The data collection techniques that are used in the War Childhood Museum research embrace visual methods and interviews. Interviews for video testimonies are conducted using the method of oral history, wherein researchers ask open-ended questions to which participants respond the way they wish, and as long as they want. As it states on the Museum website “The process of interviewing represents audio-video documenting (recorded by camera in pre-designed studio) of testimonies-personal stories on growing up in the war employing a method of oral history”. Hence, The Museum’s methodology relies on personal accounts, i.e., oral history that moves beyond a mere historical account and shifts towards the history of one’s own life entwined with strong emotional components (emotional memory) of the lived experience. Thus, the primary data is retrieved during the interview, that is the first-hand narrative of memories. Importantly, all the research activities in the War Childhood Museum are supervised by psychologists of PSIHOLAB (as stated on the Museum’s website). The general themes, covered by oral history interviews³, embrace: life at present, life before the war, memories about the beginning of the war, the experience of displacement/being a refugee, one’s living conditions (water and electricity supply), food and provisions, safety, first-hand experience and witness of shelling and sniper fire, family life, friends and crushes, school, hobbies, games, UN soldiers and foreign journalists/ humanitarians, the experience of being wounded, personal losses, the impact of war childhood on later life, the participant perception of being waged elsewhere today... (“Interviewing process”, para. 9, Museum’s website).

The Sarajevo project resonates with a methodological approach perceiving the child as an active, autonomous subject, speaking out about own experiences and actively participating in the research process. Accessing their childhood memories provides circumstances for the participants to emancipate from the (historically) oppressive, and hierarchical perception of their subjectivity, subordinate to the experiences of adults. Paraphrasing Rogers (1956), it helps them to *become a person*, with the increasing openness to

³ The team of a medical anthropologist, a historian, and an expert on children’s rights alongside three psychologists meticulously created a set of themes/questions for an audio-video interview.

experience, and liberating memories from the defense mechanisms. This, in turn, facilitates research insights into the various situational contexts of childhood experiences.

The War Childhood Museum in Sarajevo creates a space where qualitative recognition of the research design provides with idiographic, emic descriptions and exploration of childhood memories, empowering their voices and respecting their narrative as a part of the collective experience of surviving the war. The table below provides an overview of the War Childhood Museum methodology.

Table 1. Methodological features of the activities of War Childhood Museum in Sarajevo.

Paradigm	Emancipatory Participatory (epistemology)
Theoretical orientation	Social constructivism Critical theory
Orientation	Qualitative approach
Data sources	Primary (interviews) and secondary (artifacts) ⁴
Data collection method	Oral history Audio-video documentation recorded with a camera Testimonies: personal stories about growing up during the war
Data analysis and interpretation	Thematic coding (identify patterns, creating and arranging codes into themes) ⁵ .
Ethical considerations	The American Anthropological Association Statement on Ethics Principles of Professional Responsibility (AAA)

Source: Author's research.

The interaction between the participatory involvement in the research and the emancipatory orientation of reconstructing the collective experience and (emotional) memory provides an inclusive and diverse reconstruction of the socially constructed knowledge and understanding of life occurrences.

⁴ Each participant writes a story about his or her experiences and memories of the conflict, which may be directly or indirectly related to the subject.

⁵ Key emotional emerging themes such as the sense of loss, feeling safe and finding a refuge, falling in love, playing and learning, family life, dealing with physical suffering, hunger, etc.

In this context, recalling Jan Assmann's reflections, inspired by the insights of French sociologist Maurice Halbwachs on memory, proves how strong the connection between our meaning-making, identity-shaping, and memory is. Whether individual or collective, memory is a property of our personal as well as social self, as it is formed in communication with others. As we are members of various communities or societies in each of them, we build and sustain certain ideas, and images about ourselves, accompanied by a shared awareness of the past (Assmann & Czaplicka, 1995, p. 12). Through oral history, narrated from a childhood memory perspective, the retrospective stories of war evoke a wide array of emotions in the narrators (participants). At the same time, they provide them with the opportunity to release the traumatic memories and make a clear statement of the importance of their biographies in the wider context of social structure. Moreover, in its emancipatory context, the exhibition (as well as the book) challenges the preconceived ideas of war as a military conflict on the battlefield, liberating the narrative from the linear, black-white picture of growing up during an armed conflict. As the testimonies prove, war childhood can still be a scene of the experiences typical for a formative year of teenagers, such as crushes and first love:

[...] It's probably a defence mechanism, but one tries to remember more of the good. The first thing that I think of when I think about the war is, believe it or not, love. In 1993 I met my soulmate, my forever love, spent the whole war with him, married him, and today, out of that love, we have two beautiful children. In a certain sense, this love makes me a war profiteer.

Video, *Untitled*, 2023, War Childhood Museum, Sarajevo.

Such an approach holds the potential for the (formerly) marginalized or underprivileged groups, acknowledging them as experts: co-researchers, and collaborators in the process of gathering and interpreting data, rather than merely representing the community being investigated. Here, the participants are involved in identifying and defining the problem (through personal insight), collecting, and analyzing the data, as well as disseminating the findings and using them to inform the practice. In consequence, they act as social actors, active constructors of their own lives, and participants in the social life of the communities in which they live (Melton et al., 2014). They match

the memories with the artifacts that act as a reservoir for their biographical experiences nurturing the in-born human need for reevaluating their sense of meaning:

That was when I realized what it had come to represent: a reminder of my grandfather who passed away too soon; safety, in my mother's eyes; my home, leisure, and an escape from the daily realities of war. I no longer hope to pass this swing with its little bell on to my child. I hope that my child will have a carefree childhood, filled with playdates at the park. I do not plan to tire my child with stories from the war. Instead, I will bring my child to the War Childhood Museum to show her this swing filled with dreams, fantasies, and hopes – the safest hiding place in besieged Sarajevo.

Object label, The safest hiding place in besieged Sarajevo, October 2023, War Childhood Museum, Sarajevo.



Photo 1: The swing.

Source: War Childhood Museum, October 2023. Photo taken by the author.

Conclusions

Even though childhood in war has been relatively well documented in the post-WWII literature (e.g., *Diary of the Young Girl* by Anne Frank) their perspective is rarely considered when reconstructing the historical narratives of war. The Museum's mission, as published on its website to "document the experience of those who played no role in the start of the war, and still suffered multiple 'consequences'" (Halilović, 2015) penetrates these aspects of an armed conflict that have been marginalized by the dominant adults' perspective and as the founder stresses "[c]hildren's stories are particularly important for their potential and suitability to serve as a basis for advancing the mutual understanding, which is essential for the reconciliation process" (WCM website). Hence, such an approach to childhood experiences is not only emancipatory and participatory but equally change-oriented. The museum, additionally, educates the visitors on society's responsibility to protect children during an armed conflict, highlighting the fact that during the war children are often subject to violence, exile, the ordeal of sexual assault, or even forced to take an active part in military operations (soldiers in wars) (UNICEF, 2018).

Contrary to quantitative – positivist or post-positivist – paradigms, where the researcher acts as the authority figure (given the research design, its philosophical underpinning, methods, and ways of working with data), in participatory approach participant involvement at practically every stage of the research process comes to the forefront. Such orientation enables, at the same time, the emancipatory potential of storytelling by providing the insider perspective. Moreover, the participants are empowered to provide their interpretation of the researcher's findings, voicing their opinion in response to the researcher, thereby giving voice to the community or group that is being researched ("wartime children" in this stance). Aligning itself with a non-positivist approach to social inquiry, such methodological position offers both credibility to the findings and the researcher, negating the rigid positivist adherence to the separation of researcher and subjects.

The emancipatory (and participatory) nature of the initiatives of the War Childhood Museum lies in the following:

- inclusive model of diverse (ethnic, national, gender) voices and perspectives, addressing issues relevant to the (local) community⁶;
- sharing testimonial experiences and creating collective memory regardless of the ethnic, religious background, and educational level of the collaborators;
- nurturing critical consciousness and retrospective insight into a child's experience from an adult's perspective; enabling cultural reconstruction and transformation of the past;
- providing space for dialogue: between the researched and the participant, the participant and own experience, as well as the participants and the cultural context of their biography;
- insightful retrospection that empowers:
- personal well-being by reaching out to the cumulated emotions (their articulation and acknowledgment),
- growth: through processing the past traumatic experience,
- self-awareness: by legitimization of the first-person point of view, emancipating one's self from the contingent forces that inhibit the full emergence as expressive subjects (*becoming a person* in Carl Roger's optics).

Children and the world they construct remain at the center of the study. Through the retrospective recreation of experiences exploring ways of perceiving, interpreting, and experiencing the phenomena of the world and communicating one's own experiences, new areas of social participation emerge. Distinguishing a negative logic (emancipation/freedom "from") as well as a positive one (emancipation/freedom "to") (Czerepaniak-Walczak, 2004, p. 368), the War Childhood Museum in Sarajevo liberates its collaborators from the dominant narrative of the adult perspective of war, and at the same time facilitates the emancipation to express oneself through the exploration of one's own experiences. Such approach emphasize collaboration and engagement with the local communities, seeking to challenge power structures and promote social change (emancipatory), while focusing on equitable involvement and the generation of relevant knowledge (participatory).

⁶ Moreover, the Museum provides access to its collections by request for study and research.

Taking the above into account, the Museum functions as a socially and educationally relevant space and a facilitator in the process of the (re)construction of a collective history. As Crooke (2016) highlights, this can be a strengthening response to a political atmosphere disadvantageous for the diversity of voices as their narrative, and history has been neglected (p. 88), expressing belief “in the positive social impact of producing such a history” (Crooke, 2016). Storytelling illustrated by the (donated) items – artifacts of the war childhood, proves to have a positive social significance as, according to Assman “every individual memory constitutes itself in communication with [...]. groups who conceive their unity and peculiarity through a common image of the past”, captured in the forms of “objectivized culture” represented by texts, images, rites, monuments, and museums. (Assman & Czaplicka, 1995, pp. 127–128). This, in turn, may provide content for identity shaping, transcending the ethnic and nationalist boundaries enforced by the mainstream political realm of the contemporary Bosnia-Herzegovina “forging deeper connections among people across the ethnic divide” (Crooke, 2016, p. 88). Moreover, the Museum critically (or even rebelliously?) questions the politically acknowledged account of the armed conflict challenging their historic as well as nationalist narratives in the public sphere (and/or war museums):

“[...] Damn you, why are you killing our souls, which exist only to love? To love peace, to love play, to love happiness... But then again, I won't curse you, because you are also the fathers of children who love peace and happiness...”

Nina (Nirvana) Zeljković (1983–1995)

Object label, My sister Nina, 2023, War Childhood Museum, Sarajevo.

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