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No future? Narrating the past in Bosnian history museums

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Recent unrest and the 2014 elections have corroborated the impression of Bosnia as a failing state, one that is constantly being undermined by the three-way impasse between constituent ethnic groups of Bosniaks, Croats, and Serbs. Major history museums in Bosnia, however, provide a more complex picture. This paper analyzes museums and exhibitions on twentieth-century history in Sarajevo, Banja Luka, and Jajce, with regard to their narrative strategies, their aesthetic appearance, and the commemorative practices in their respective locations. From this perspective, the use of history in building group identity in Bosnia is far from coherent. Although museums are one means to assert firmly entrenched national identities both old and new, they compete at the same time with nostalgic commemorations of socialist Yugoslavia and with equally nostalgic references to the Austrian occupation. Various civic groups struggle to assert their visions of belonging, mostly with rather modest financial means. Based on these findings, this paper will explore not only the underlying assumptions of what history and, in particular, museums are all about, but also how visions of the future of Bosnia and Herzegovina are inscribed in these uses of history – if indeed they are.

Keywords: history; Bosnia; museum; Yugoslavia

Introduction

"Smrt fašizmu – sloboda narodu" ("death to fascism – freedom to the people"). The words in the colorful windowpane are still legible. They greet visitors to Sarajevo's Historical Museum of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Some letters are missing, smashed, or splintered off, evidence of shelling near the frontline of a war that was fought here almost two decades ago. A stripe of yellow adhesive tape runs across the window. It reads "culture shutdown" and refers to a website titled "Bosnia-Herzegovina's cultural institutions in crisis."[1] The mere fact that it still shows an exhibition is an act of defiance in the face of blatant neglect. Nearby, a banner on the National Museum of Bosnia reads "Muzej je zatvoren – the museum is closed," in both Serbo-Croatian and English. The Historical Museum is still standing, but it can barely make good on the claim of its name, to show the entire history of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Beyond temporary exhibitions, the key feature of the museum nowadays is the impressive permanent exhibition on Sarajevo under siege.

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The slogan "Death to fascism – freedom to the people" is emblematic; it hints in a very material way at the ongoing presence of Socialist Yugoslavia. This is far from being trivial. General wisdom has it that in Bosnia, as elsewhere in the former Yugoslav space, ethno-nationalist narratives predominate and have long crowded out alternative narrations. In an incisive analysis of memory discourse and memory practices in Bosnia, Nicolas Moll has argued that commemorative practices centered on the antifascism of Tito's Yugoslavia were simply too weak to challenge the dominant ethno-nationalist narratives in a fragmented country and often merged with them (Moll 2013, 930). Museums show a somewhat different picture. In the three major Bosnian history museums, I analyze in this paper, nationalist discourse seems rather too weak to displace the legacy of Yugoslavia. Their narration and their aesthetics are deeply rooted in a Yugoslav past. The museums thus provide sites for residual narratives and practices, which undermine or even openly challenge the dominant nationalist approach, which is voiced so unequivocally on official occasions and anniversaries.

This, in part, has to do with the very nature of museums as a specific medium within the broader field of cultures of memory. History museums do not simply tell a story, like a scholarly book or a documentary. They tell stories by means of exhibiting and presenting material objects, relics of the past. Originating in the so-called new museology, new ways of thinking about objects, visitors, and spaces have heightened our awareness of the museum in general as a place that generates meaning and offers the visitor specific modes of knowledge and understanding as both an intellectual and an aesthetic experience (Hooper-Greenhill 1994, 2000; Baur 2010; te Heesen 2012, 165). This thinking also applies to history museums. The objects on display are of an aesthetic nature in a threefold manner. Following the Polish-French philosopher and historian Krzysztof Pomian, museologists have debated how the fragmentary nature of visible and sometimes even tangible exhibits translates into imaginations of the past. Inasmuch as they are still familiar to memory, but already alien to the present, historic objects on display confront the visitor with the gap caused by the

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passage of time. Appealing to emotions as much as to the mind, they might lead the visitor to indulge in nostalgic longings for times gone by (Pomian 1988; Korff and Roth 1990). Second, historic objects evoke the past, but seldom tell a story by themselves. It is only by their aesthetic arrangement within the exhibition that a historical narrative unfolds. In offering an aesthetic interpretation of the past, the history museum has been interpreted as helping to secure identity in a world of rapid change (Lübbe 1982). Third, and no less relevant for the purposes of this paper, the architecture of the museum itself is a major element of the aesthetic experience and the narration. As a historic site, the building itself can be an exhibit. Any museum building makes a statement on the museum's general rationale and its place within society at the time of its opening (Giebelhausen 2006). It is the building that embodies the intended durability of the museum, its reference to future generations for which the objects on display are being collected and preserved. This is an aesthetic question as much as an economic one. Museums are institutions. They need funding, not only for the maintenance of both edifice and exhibition, but also for the staff. The smashed window pane in the entrance hall of the museum in Sarajevo is a case in point. It hints both at the history of the building and at its current neglect. In being turned into an aesthetic object it has become part of the story.

Finally, scholarship has begun to attend to the means by which museums invite individual interpretations of the past and to engage in communication on historical experience, rather than presenting the visitor with canonical narratives (Beier-de Haan 2005). Museums, especially when located on historic sites, serve as the focus of commemorative practices that may affirm or elude the intentions of their founders. These intentions can be quite diverse. Traditional museums see themselves as educational institutions. As such, they appeal mostly to the intellect. Throughout Europe, this approach has come under pressure in recent decades. History museums are increasingly being designed to appeal to emotions, to convey a sense either of piety or of excitement. They seek new ways for the visitor to relive events and to identify with heroes or victims.

Just like any other form of historical narration, history museums are primarily expected to convey a sense of belonging, community, or identity. They link the past to the future and try to make sense of contingency (Rüsen 2013). The title of this paper suggests that this might not be fully the case in Bosnia and Herzegovina. What kind of future do these museums envisage when they interpret the past?

With these issues in mind, this paper will focus on three museums: the Historical Museum of Bosnia and Herzegovina in Sarajevo; the Museum of Republic of Srpska in Banja Luka; and the Museum of the Second AVNOJ Conference in Jajce. As will be seen, these three museums, though located on different institutional levels, correspond in their respective approaches to the history of Bosnia and Herzegovina in its Yugoslav context in the twentieth century. The paper is based on personal visits to a number of museums in Bosnia and Herzegovina and throughout the Yugoslav space, on their print and online publications, and on interviews with several staff members of the Historical Museum of Bosnia and Herzegovina in Sarajevo.

The historical museum of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Sarajevo

The Historical Museum of Bosnia and Herzegovina is in a unique position. By the mere fact of still being kept open by its staff, it clings to the idea of a common Bosnian state that has long withdrawn its material support. It has its origins in the Museum of National Liberation established in Sarajevo right after World War II. In 1949, it was renamed the Museum of National Revolution of Bosnia and Herzegovina, and in 1967 the Museum of Revolution of

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Bosnia and Herzegovina. In June 1993, it was given its current name.[2] The sequence of these names already hints at a retreat from its original purpose, which was to legitimize the Socialist Bosnian Republic that had been proclaimed in 1943. Today, the museum is the remnant of a defunct state.

The building that houses today's Historical Museum of Bosnia and Herzegovina was built directly for this purpose and opened in 1963. The broad windowpanes set in a concrete structure testify to the socialist modernism of the building, quite in line with the Museum of the Revolution in Belgrade, which was opened three years before. The outstanding feature of the building is its resistance to decay. In 2013, a hole in the ceiling was filled in by a wooden board from the museum's collection, showing a festive ceremony on the back side. The lively museum shop in the entrance hall that was opened the same year seems to provide the museum at least with some of the funding needed to sustain a minimum of heating and maintenance.

The permanent exhibition tells a similar story of abandonment and of being left to fend for oneself. The military origins are still visible. As mentioned above, the exhibition focuses entirely on the siege of Sarajevo between 1992 and 1995. It tells a story of improvisation in the desperate struggle for survival. The very first objects presented to the visitor are weapons. This is a recurrent feature in history museums throughout the region. In this exhibition, however, the display of weapons resonates somewhat ironically since it was to the museum itself that in 1992 the defenders of Sarajevo, unprepared and in disbelief, had to go in order to procure their guns. Other, makeshift guns on display make the visitor wonder whether he himself would be able to assemble a firearm from scratch. Among the highlights of the exhibition are an improvised mortar and a satellite radio, which is presented here as the only remaining link to the outside world during the siege.

The main focus of the exhibition, however, is not armed struggle, but rather hardship and survival. Photos show urban settlements falling back into rural self-sufficiency, with vegetables being grown on tiny plots between housing blocks. One wonders how these could have been defended during the night against hungry plunderers. The visitor is shown the primitive diet in a city under siege, insufficiently supplied with noodles, canned food, and handmade soap via the shattered road from Sarajevo's international airport. What was left of support from abroad tells a story of deprivation. These exhibits serve as evidence of the city's desertion by the outside world that had betrayed the simple moral standards enshrined in international law.

The exhibition also tells a story of creative resourcefulness: a makeshift generator, made out of a truck engine, testifies to how people overcame the dire shortage of electricity. A local factory continued to produce cigarettes under the label "wartime production." Paper currency was of the most primitive sort.

These objects are framed by photographs on the walls that depict physical destruction, and the hardships of everyday life in a city plagued by snipers. The exhibition fully relies on its objects to tell their story, visitors' knowledge of the general course of events being assumed. There are few references to the front lines, and almost no mention of the other side, the Yugoslav Army and later the Army of the Bosnian Serbs. As if in a horror film coming true, the evil is omnipresent, but invisible.

Quite obviously, this is a story of victimization, but of a peculiar sort – one without perpetrators. The refusal to blame, even to name the evildoers, might be seen as a feeble attempt if not to reconcile, then at least to avoid ethnic categorizations. The museum shows citizens of Sarajevo under siege, with almost no mention made of an ethnic or religious dimension of the struggle. It shows the resistance of a presumably civilized modernity to a presumably anonymous barbarian onslaught.

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The exhibition provides the focal point for one of three competing national narratives of Bosnian Muslims. It contrasts the story told about the Srebrenica massacre, where an estimated 8000 Bosnian Muslim men were killed by Bosnian Serb forces in a United Nations proclaimed "safe area" in late July 1995, while helpless and outnumbered Dutch forces looked away and failed to intervene. Right in the center of Sarajevo, the Gallery 11/07/95 houses a lurid photo exhibition by Bosnian photographer Tarik Samarah of exhumations in Srebrenica.[3] It shows atrocities of the cruelest sort committed against Bosnian Muslims by Serbs. The photos illustrate the attempt to create a neatly defined national identity for Muslim Bosniaks out of the experience of a declared genocide, centered not at Sarajevo but on the site of the UN enclave at Potočari itself, which today holds the Muslim cemetery with its uniform rows of gravestones as well as a memorial. The cemetery and the adjacent museum at Potočari not only serve as a site of mourning, they are also designed to force the surrounding Serb population to acknowledge the genocide and to remind the international community of its blatant failure to prevent it (Duijzings 2007). The Memorial Center Srebrenica – Potočari is also one of the main sponsors of the Gallery 11/07/95, which functions as its branch office in the Bosnian capital.

In contrast, the Sarajevo Historical Museum of Bosnia and Herzegovina provides an urban counternarrative to the national idea anchored in the Srebrenica narrative. It aims to preserve a comprehensive Bosnian identity as opposed to an exclusively Bosniak one. In aesthetic terms, it sets the memory of hardship and deprivation against the horror of decaying corpses. In trying to preserve the memory of the prospect of multiethnic modernity that Sarajevo once embodied so vividly, it mourns a future that was destroyed before ever coming into being. Centered as it is on the experience of Sarajevo alone, this offer to pick up once more on lost hopes seems to stand little chance to expand beyond the city itself. What once might have been the idea of a comprehensive Bosnia has now been limited geographically to the central districts of its capital city. This is reflected in the unwillingness of national institutions to provide further funding.

The city of Sarajevo itself prefers to stick to its own museum, which is jointly supported by the canton of Sarajevo and the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina and provides yet another vision of Muslim, that is, Bosniak identity. One of its branches, which covers the decades from 1878 to 1918 and was formerly the Museum of Gavrilo Princip, seeks the roots of Sarajevan modernity in the period of the Austrian occupation.[4] It recalls that Muslim identity in Bosnia was once viewed as reconcilable with European culture. Yet in confronting the Habsburg tradition with the revolutionary movement embodied by Gavrilo Princip, the museum seems to suggest that this prospect was brutally cut short on 28 June 1914 – Vidovdan, or St. Vitus' Day – when Princip assassinated the Austrian crown prince and his wife, thus triggering World War I. In placing clumsy wax figures of the imperial couple next to the assassin's original weapon, the museum focuses the visitor's attention on a spectacular event in a nostalgic context. There is no reference to interwar Yugoslavia and no links either to the urban community addressed in the Historical Museum of Bosnia and Herzegovina or to the genocidal narrative of Srebrenica. In this interpretation, the future was already over before it had even begun.

This branch of Sarajevo's city museum attracts mostly international visitors, especially because it is located directly in the old town among other sightseeing attractions. The Historical Museum of Bosnia and Herzegovina, by contrast, although equally open to tourists, actively addresses local visitors. It encourages them to bring along memorial objects and photos from the time of the siege, so as to serve as witnesses to the period and, in the words of the museum website, to provide "irrefutable proof about the strength,

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resourcefulness, persistence, and decisiveness of the citizens of this country to survive."[5] This actually happens. To citizens of Sarajevo, the museum has become a place where they can deposit their memories in a dignified manner and where they can reassert their defiance against the destruction of the multiethnic modernity for which Sarajevo once stood. According to information by a museum guide, it draws its visitors equally from among the Muslim and the Serb population. The attention given to the story of a nine-year-old Serbian school girl who was allegedly traumatized by the photos of victims she saw at the exhibition of Sarajevo during the siege seems somewhat out of proportion in light of the horrors on display at the Srebrenica gallery.[6] Yet it does suggest that in spite of its fairly moderate presentation, the story that the Historical Museum of Bosnia and Herzegovina tells is far from being uncontested.

The museum of Republic of Srpska, Banja Luka

The Museum of Republic of Srpska in Banja Luka might be expected to be the Serbian equivalent to Sarajevo's historical museums. The concrete modernism that greets the occasional visitor to its current building likewise stems from the socialist period. The museum is less monumental than its Sarajevo counterpart and has an air of neat and solid provincialism. It shows no signs of neglect. Its elements of outright nationalism, and the institution's deep roots in the interwar period, make it quite different.



Source: http://www.muzejrs.com/about-museum,2.html

The history of the museum dates back to 1930, when King Alexander introduced a royal dictatorship and redesigned the administration of his country, which was renamed the "Kingdom of Yugoslavia." A museum and a theater were to provide the newly established Vrbaska Banovina with a cultural center and identity. In 1941, when German occupation had destroyed the Yugoslav state, the museum was briefly renamed the "Croatian State Ethnographic Museum" by the Ustasha regime. These ethnographic origins are still quite

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visible in the exhibitions, and so is the merger with the Museum of National Liberation in 1953 (Bajic et al. 2004, 6–7). For more than four decades, it was known as the "Bosanska Krajina Museum." In November 1992, it was renamed the "Museum of Republic of Srpska." Thus, what today claims to be the national museum of Bosnian Serbs has a long record of conveying Yugoslav identity on a regional basis.

The history of the site of Banja Luka's Museum of the Republic of Srpska is as haphazard as the history of the museum itself. After having been established in 1930, it was first located for some years on the private premises of local notables. In 1934, it moved into a side wing of its sister institution, the newly built theater, then named "House of King Peter I, the Great Liberator" (Dom kralja Petra I Velikog Oslobodioca).[7] A hybrid of Bauhaus modernism and neoclassicism, the building seems to have been somewhat inadequate, if only due to lack of space. So the museum moved on to the local castle (Kastel) on the Vrbas riverside, before it found its current, permanent home in 1983. It is now located in the "Solidarity House" (Dom Solidarnosti), together with the regional library and a children's theater (Bajic et al. 2004, 7). This building was erected in the 1970s as the "House of Worker's Solidarity" (Dom radničke Solidarnosti), the physical embodiment of socialist cultural ambitions in the town at that time. The building is one of the early works of Velimir Neidhardt, who is now one of Croatia's internationally renowned architects.[8] Thus, just as in Sarajevo, the location of the museum points to its roots in the modernism of socialist Yugoslavia, even though its history dates back to the modernism of the interwar years.

The very name of the Muzej Republike Srpske at Banja Luka, or "Museum of Republic of Srpska," as its name is given in English, suggests a national counternarrative to the Bosnian narratives in Sarajevo. Yet, the visitor should not expect a powerful narration of Serbian traditions in the region and beyond, a propaganda machine to hammer home the Bosnian version of Serbian nationalism, but rather something much less spectacular, namely, a regional heritage museum of somewhat uneven and indistinct composition.

The permanent exhibition follows the history of the region along major battles up to the late nineteenth century. As so often happens in Bosnian museums, history appears as an unbroken series of military altercations. Ornate sabers and rusty knives, helmets and cannon balls, guns and pistols convey the notion of a distant past, as if in a picture book or a romantic novel. It is a story of Christians and Ottomans in a sheer, endless struggle. The Ottomans, however, are not presented simply as alien intruders, but also as bearers of a rich and exotic culture. Their helmets and shields look somewhat different and are finely crafted. They also left behind finely chased coffee pots. One of the highlights is an Ottoman *berât*, a legal document that testifies to the skillful art of calligraphy. None of the exhibits are properly described, nor does the exhibition provide the reader with any context. Yet an attentive visitor will note that in the museum's reading, the Ottomans did indeed come not simply as conquerors, but also as state-builders.

One can view these sections as telling a story of the conflict-ridden Christian-Ottoman symbiosis, in a regional interpretation of Bosnian history. The Ottoman period is not presented as negative, as might be expected; the Ottomans themselves, however, remain exotic. There is no link to the modernization narrative on display in Sarajevo's municipal museum. A solitary bust of Emperor Francis Joseph points to the decades under Austrian occupation. Some coins and a typewriter recall the advent of economic and bureaucratic modernity during the interwar period. The guidebook and the website skip the years from 1878 to 1941 altogether.

The historical exhibition culminates and ends in a section on World War II. Sickles and machine guns tell the story of peasants and partisans in their heroic struggle against German

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occupation. This section most likely derives from the earlier Museum of National Liberation. It seems unaltered, and it remains displayed in full. The museum came up with an equally inventive and instructive solution. It now hides the original vitrines behind a set of black partitions on which a series of photos – showing crimes committed in the Jasenovac concentration camp – are displayed. This section represents a strident charge against the Croatian Ustasha regime and their crimes against Serbian victims – a familiar story of genocide.



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On the second floor, which was opened only recently, another section of the museum tells the story of the Jasenovac concentration camp and its commemoration up to the present. Thus, in a museum that had itself briefly been an Ustasha institution, the outcry against Jasenovac now figures as the nationalist core of Bosnia's Republika Srpska and its museum. This is the only overt element of the Bosnian Serb national narrative within the exhibition itself. In its obsession with the Ustasha genocide, which is typical for Serbian nationalism, the museum targets Croats much more aggressively than Muslim Bosniaks (Radonic 2010; Moll 2013, 918; Pavlaković 2013). In its regional approach, the museum thus targets Croats much more aggressively than the Muslim Bosniaks. This might be explained by the fairly large proportion of Serbian refugees from Croatia in Banja Luka. At the same time, the story of Jasenovac does not exclude the earlier partisan narrative, with its notions of brotherhood and unity in a common struggle. It is rather superimposed upon the earlier exhibition in a very tangible way. No attempt whatsoever has been made to link the two stories, however. One might praise this as a multi-perspective approach, although it seems rather multi-layered. There is something highly metaphorical to this part of the exhibition.

The rest of the museum focuses on archeology and ethnology, natural history, and the history of art, the exhibition mostly unchanged since Yugoslav times. Socialist Yugoslavia is still very much present; it is not yet consigned to history. What is missing is a section on the history of the city of Banja Luka that would address both coexistence and its destruction, if only by showing architecture past and present. Only the guidebook mentions the recent wars, and only in passing: "for well-known reasons (iz objektivnih razloga), the

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exhibits were returned to the museum only in 1997" goes one explanation (Bajic et al. 2004, 6–7). The art history section features a portrait gallery of local notables from Ottoman times through to interwar Yugoslavia, painted by the Bosnian artist Špiro Bočarić and others. They all date from the early twentieth century, focusing on the heroes of the Bosnian and Herzegovinian Uprising of 1875, the Serbian and later Yugoslav King Petar Karadjordjević, and Banus Milosavljević, the founding father of the museum, in civilian clothing, but also the Croat Bishop Juraj Strossmayer, one of the authors of a South Slav national idea (Bajic et al. 2004, 41–44).[9] The ideology of interwar Yugoslavia is neatly preserved in this section, and so is its Serbian coloring.

Aside from the exhibit on Jasenovac, the museum itself barely provides a Serbian national narrative. As an educational institution in a traditional sense, it instead serves as a focal point where school classes and visitors from the region can make connections with what they have already learned elsewhere. It also provides a stage for other, more outspoken elements of Serbian nationalism. Throughout the summer of 2014, the museum welcomed visitors with a temporary exhibit about the Serbian lands in 1914 (Radojić and Vračar 2014). It told the heroic story of national self-defense and of horrid crimes committed against the Serbian nation: a story of great men, of monarchs and military leaders who had guided the nation and its soldiers through suffering and sacrifice. Arms, battlefields, and heroes are the stuff of this history. The specificity of Bosnia and Banja Luka are entirely absent; the exhibition could have been mounted without any modification in Belgrade, Kraljevo, or elsewhere in Serbia.

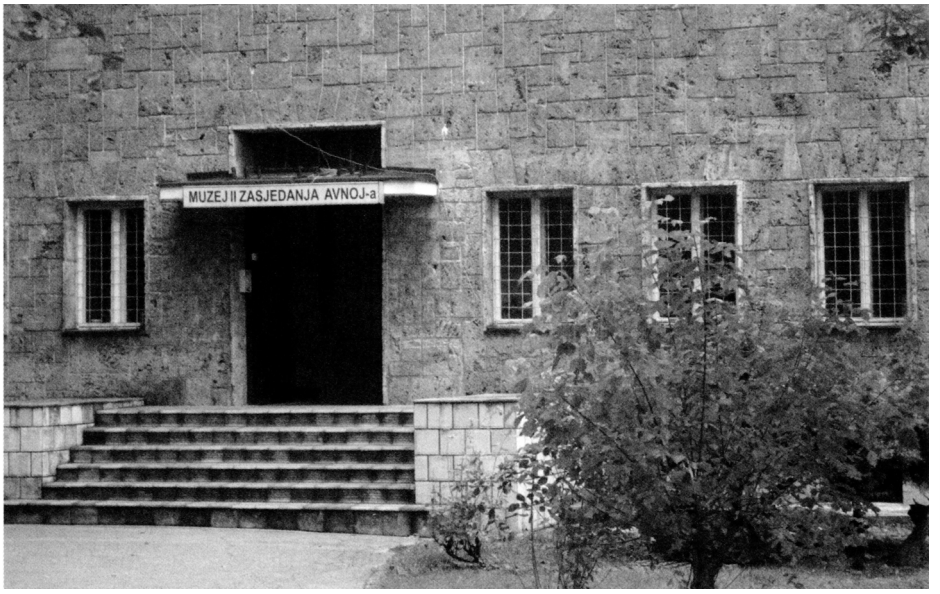
In this vein, on 9 October 2014, a monumental statue of Grand Prince Stefan Nemanja, who has long been revered as the founding father of the medieval Serbian state and church, was unveiled in front of the museum. President Milorad Dodik took the opportunity to emphasize the aspirations of Republika Srpska toward independence as a state of its own, rather than an entity of Bosnia. Three days before the polls, the occasion served him equally well in highlighting his aspirations for reelection.[10]

The museum in Banja Luka inscribes the core element of nationalist Serbian propaganda against Ustasha Croatia onto an otherwise unaltered regional heritage museum that it inherited from socialist times. As yet it lacks a coherent national narrative that would underpin Republika Srpska as a political entity; in what outwardly presents itself as the national museum in the national capital, there is no attempt to show an idea of the nation's future by turning to its past. Instead, different layers of history, both of the region and of the museum itself, come to the fore. History becomes visible as a set of incoherent, narrative fragments, built out of meaningless remnants and bits of outright propaganda. For staunch constructivists, this museum is a wonderful place.

The museum of the Second AVNOJ Conference, Jajce

The third museum I will discuss is located in Jajce, some 70 kilometers from Banja Luka, one-third of the way back to Sarajevo. The museum itself is a historical site (Nikolić 2012). Here, in November 1943, the Anti-Fascist Council for the National Liberation of Yugoslavia (Antifašističko Vijeće Narodnog Oslobođenja Jugoslavije or AVNOJ) held its famous second conference, in which it deposed King Peter II and the government-in-exile, laid the foundations of a federated Yugoslavia made of six constituent republics, and proclaimed Josip Broz Tito prime minister of the newly formed provisional government. Jajce is the birthplace of socialist Yugoslavia.

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The AVNOJ museum in Jajce is housed in the former gymnasium of the local branch of Yugoslavia's Sokol Association, which lies just outside the old town, beyond the river Pliva whose spectacular waterfalls flow into the Vrbas. The building was opened in 1935. Partisan units set it on fire in October 1942, when they were forced to surrender the town to German occupation forces for the first time. One year later, after the partisans briefly reconquered the city, surrendered, and reconquered it again, the badly damaged house was rebuilt in order to house the AVNOJ conference (Bešlagić 1958, 71; Milak n.d.). During the Bosnian war in the 1990s, the building was once again burned down and looted. In its present iteration, having been reconstructed according to earlier photographs, it serves as a reminder not only of the AVNOJ conference and socialist partisan warfare, but of the roots of Yugoslavia in the even earlier South Slav national movement (Sahovic and Zulumovic 2012; Tevapčević 2014a, 13).

The museum was first opened in 1953, precisely 10 years after the AVNOJ conference. The setting was carefully reconstructed as it had been at the time of the event. The desire for authenticity is best indicated by the portraits of Stalin, Roosevelt, and Churchill, and by banners celebrating the common struggle against German occupation. Tito's armchair, facing the podium, is easily recognized on photos of the actual conference that line the walls. They also show that in 1943, a bust of Tito was already standing there. Today we see only a replica, since the original, sculpted by Antun Augustinčić for the occasion, was destroyed during the war and the copy of it during the 1990s.[11] One begins to understand how closely socialist Yugoslavia was connected to his person. The personality cult of Tito is precisely as old as the state that he was about to establish, and both are closely intertwined.

While socialist Yugoslavia still existed, the AVNOJ museum was one of the major sites of the institutionalization of Yugoslav identity, memorializing the partisan struggle for national liberation, not just in the region, but countrywide. The museum stood on par with Tito's birthplace in Kumrovec and with the Museum of the Revolution in Belgrade (now the Museum of Yugoslav History). It was designed as a "time capsule" and a

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memorial room, commemorating not only the events themselves, but subsequent anniversary commemorations as well (Tevapčević 2014b).

During the war in Bosnia, the AVNOJ museum was looted when Jajce was captured first by Serbian and later by Bosnian and Croat forces. The museum was reopened only in 2008, mostly on the private initiative of veteran associations and with little government support from the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Many exhibits from the museum's large collection have been returned, mostly photographs of the 1943 conference. Other exhibits are still missing and in the best circumstances have been replaced by facsimiles. Traces of destruction remain quite visible.

The current exhibition showcases the experience of World War II in each of the constituent republics of socialist Yugoslavia. Each is represented by a vitrine over which hangs a banner sponsored by the respective veteran association; in them, the story of the war in what are today the successor states of Yugoslavia is told.[12]



Source: http://muzejavnoj.ba/virtuelna-tura/sala/

This is not as trivial as it might appear. Two years ago, the Museum of the History of Yugoslavia in Belgrade mounted a temporary exhibition on the history of Yugoslavia that was curated by a team of historians from several of the successor states (Knežević and Panić 2013). World War II was basically omitted from the exhibition. It was too sensitive an issue, and the curators could not agree on how to address it. This is not just an issue of competing interpretations among the various successor states. The experience of World War II is rather highly contested even within the respective societies. There is no consensus as to how to present the Chetnik movement of Draža Mihajlović in Serbian museums, and in Croatia, the legacy of the Ustasha state is equally controversial.

The AVNOJ museum in Jajce might be understood as precisely the missing link in the Belgrade exhibition. It demonstrates that the war experience can in fact be addressed if one allows for a multiplicity of narratives, if diverse and conflicting experiences can actually be told and confronted with each other without smoothing over the differences. Given the high relevance of references to the war in the breakup of Yugoslavia during the 1990s, this attempt to bring together different perspectives should not be underestimated. It has been made possible by the idea of a common experience of partisan warfare and its erstwhile relevance to socialist Yugoslavia, an idea that unites the various veterans unions. Provincial

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Jajce has become the place where these experiences can be told within a national framework without provoking an official response.

Every year in November, veterans assemble near the museum to commemorate socialist Yugoslavia and partisan warfare. Some wave flags, others wear a partisan uniform. Videos show an atmosphere of celebration and entertainment. People sing songs, joyfully greet old friends or relatives, and applaud each other as they lay down flowers at a nearby coffin-like monument dedicated to the defenders and liberators of Jajce.[13] Politicians tend to avoid what has been termed a "necrophiliac celebration" as they do not want to be associated with the Communist tradition. Yet one might equally see these festivities as a carnivalesque, subversive appropriation of a past that has been left to itself and lacks any state-sponsored discursive framework (Tevapčević 2014a, 2014b, 7). Within the Bosnian context, post-Communist nostalgia and the longing for a past presumably shaped by practices of "brotherhood and unity" does not so much suggest anti-capitalist or anti-democratic sentiment, but rather testifies to the longing for a decent future that had once been promised before it was forcibly destroyed (Burić 2010). The AVNOJ museum in Jajce provides an ideal site for addressing and appealing to such visions of the past and its unfulfilled promises.

Conclusion

All three museums that have been discussed in this paper, their buildings as well as their exhibitions, are fragmented remnants of a Yugoslav culture of memory that has fallen into disarray. In their architecture, the socialist promise of a bright future is still visible, as are its precedents in interwar modernism. Within these shells, the museums are struggling to preserve what might be salvaged from the ruins in order to promote a sense of belonging. Ethnic nationalism is not the primary focus in any of these museums, quite the contrary. Even in Banja Luka, where nationalism is the most evident, its key elements are superimposed in fragments upon what remains in essence an ethnographic heritage museum. Both the AVNOJ museum in Jajce and, even more, the Historical Museum of Bosnia and Herzegovina in Sarajevo attempt to preserve their Yugoslav heritage against competing notions of ethnic communities, such as those promoted among Muslims in various versions of Bosniak identity that are based either upon the notion of European modernization under Habsburg patronage or on the notion of having fallen victim to genocide.

This is reflected not only in how the exhibitions are narrated, but in their conventional aesthetic approaches. By maintaining distance to the monumental narratives, all three museums refrain from capitalizing on the emotions of their visitors. They confront them with partly impressive and fascinating exhibits, but they do not attempt to overwhelm them or to make them empathize directly with the events and relive them.

Aside from these museums' lack of both substantial funding and intellectual esteem from their respective environments, their reluctance to delineate the general sense of belonging and community in coherent narratives of any sort might be attributed to a fundamental insecurity on the role of museums in societies that have not yet elaborated inclusive and coherent approaches to the socialist period. This is quite in keeping with museums in other countries of the post-Yugoslav space. While the Historical Museum of Serbia in Belgrade struggles to open its permanent exhibition, a national narrative is instead provided by the Military Museum (Lažetić and Radović 2013). In Zagreb, the municipal museum has had to compensate for the lack of a National History Museum of Croatia, which as in Belgrade is also in preparation. In Slovenia, the former Museum of the People's Revolution considerably overhauled its permanent exhibition. Renamed the Museum of Contemporary History of Slovenia in 2003, it now offers a fairly coherent and multifaceted narration of

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Slovenian national history in the twentieth century (Jurjavčič et al. 2013). Only in Macedonia has a completely new museum of national history been established: the Museum of the Macedonian Struggle, which opened in 2011 (Todorovski 2012). This institution has turned out to be a quintessential nationalist propaganda machine. Basically it is a wax museum in which key moments and key figures of the Macedonian national narrative are presented, in a somewhat revamped, three-dimensional version of a nineteenth-century history painting. Elsewhere in the former Yugoslav space, museums of contemporary history are rather full of ambivalence about clear-cut national narratives, without fully spelling it out.

But whereas in all of these countries, whether or not their museums have been refurbished, the nation is the nucleus of the exhibition, in Bosnia and Herzegovina history museums focus on individual events, disconnected islands of time within largely uncharted waters. Their most striking feature is their reluctance to ascribe any meaning to the past across the ruptures of shattered temporality. Without a coherent idea of the past to promote, they find it difficult to offer a vision of the future. Within the Bosnian context, this finding might seem rather pessimistic. Yet it inadvertently links up to a more general European tendency to understand historical museums not just as institutions offering meaning and orientation in the face of uncertainty in a rapidly changing world, but as spaces of commonality and communication around shared experiences and fragmented memories. From this perspective, the three museums that have been analyzed in this paper do not seem outdated at all. Their fragmentary and improvised narrative framework provides an openness that compares quite favorably against the overwhelming aesthetics of canonized national narrations that can be visited elsewhere in Central and Southeastern Europe.

The shattered window pane in the entrance hall of the Sarajevo museum recalls a time when the partisan slogan "Death to fascism – freedom to the people" was a joyful call to join the struggle for a better future. In being resuscitated in opposition to ethnic nationalism, it does honor to civil society protest in Sarajevo (Touquet 2011; Moll 2013, 926). Yet the windowpane likewise shows that this propaganda vision has disintegrated – although not beyond recognition. It is not presented as nostalgic pining for Tito's Yugoslavia, but as a courageous outcry against present-day stagnation and a somewhat desperate plea to reflect on which sort of past a future in Bosnia might be built upon.

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