

(Re)Shaping History in Bosnian and Herzegovinian Museums

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Abstract

The current article explores how political changes in the past 130 years have shaped and reshaped three major museums in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH). The overall aim is to describe structural processes of national museum building in BiH and the ways the museological representation of history is connected to state and nation making and to political transitions and crises. The analysed museums are the National Museum of BiH, the History Museum of BiH, and the Museum of the Republic of Srpska. The source material analysed consists of the directories and the titles of exhibitions; secondary material, which describes previous exhibitions; and virtual museum tours.

The article illustrates that during the Austrian-Hungarian Empire, which established the National Museum in 1888, the museum played an important part in the representation of Bosnian identity (*bosnjastvo*). After World War II, in the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, all three analysed museums were summoned to interpret the past in accordance with the guidelines of the communist regime. Since the 1990s, a highly ethnicized process of identity building and of the musealization of heritage, and history permeates all three museums analysed here. When it comes to the central exhibition-themes following the 1990s war, one could conclude that whereas the National Museum and the History Museum highlight the recent creation of an independent BiH and ostracize BIH-Serbs, the Museum of the Republic of Srpska asserts the ostensible distinctiveness of the Republic of Srpska and excludes the narratives about BiH as a unified and independent nation-state. If an agreement about the future of BiH and its history is to be reached, a step towards multi-vocal historical narratives has to be made from both sides.

Keywords: National museum, exhibitions, identity, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Republic of Srpska, history.

Introduction

Twenty years have passed since the end of the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH), and we can again read about conflicts and social unrest in the country (BBC 2014). In February 2014, demonstrators set fire to the government buildings, and hundreds of people were injured in the worst unrest since the end of the war in the 1990s. One of the buildings, containing valuable documents from the history of BiH, caught fire during the demonstrations (Al Jazeera 2014). The present state of museums and other institutions in BiH illustrates the liaison between ethnic, cultural, political, ideological, and economic structures and the reshaping of nation-states. For instance, a museum director pointed out that whereas ‘politicians never seem to go short, [...] important institutions like the National Museum are forced to close through lack of funding’ (Launey 2014).

The current article explores how political changes in the past 130 years have shaped and reshaped three major museums in BiH.¹ The analysis focuses on the ways different historical processes influence the thematic choice of exhibitions and the changes in the representation of national and regional history in three major museums, located in the two largest cities of BiH, Sarajevo and Banja Luka. The cities are also centres of two political entities in BiH, namely, the Federation of BiH and the Republic of Srpska. The analysed museums are the National Museum of BiH (est. 1888) in Sarajevo, the History Museum of BiH (est. 1945) in Sarajevo, and the Museum of the Republic of Srpska (est. 1930) in Banja Luka, the second largest city in BiH and the administrative centre of the Republic of Srpska.

Analytic and Methodological Considerations

The overall aim is to describe structural processes of national museum building in BiH and ways the museological representation of history is connected to state and nation making and to political transitions and crises (Aronsson 2011). Moreover, the aim is to explain how the three museums analysed here, through the descriptions of their objectives, the thematic choice of exhibitions, and the naming of exhibitions, construe and (re)negotiate national, ethnic, and other identities.

The source material analysed consists of the directories and the titles of exhibitions that have taken place since the establishment of the museums; secondary material (i.e., literature), which describes and illustrates previous exhibitions (i.e., through the photographs of exhibitions); and virtual museum tours (available at the websites: www.zemaljskimuzej.ba; www.muzejrs.com; www.muzej.ba). Even though I analyse the development of the museums since their establishment, the focus is on the period after World War II, because that is when it was first possible to compare and contrast the thematic scope of all three museums (the History

Museum was first founded in 1945). The main reasons for the choice of the museums are that they were founded under different regimes, and thus have different museological perspectives, and they are situated in two political entities that compose contemporary BiH.

Through a diachronic analysis of the titles and the central themes of a museum's exhibitions, it is possible to identify changes and/or continuity in the perspectives and highlight whose viewpoints are represented, which ideological and identity forming perspectives permeate the exhibitions, and what the aim of the exhibitions and museum institutions is. My point is that naming is a process by which one establishes and naturalizes specific historical and hierarchical relations and normative definitions of history and identity (Lozic 2010). Thus, naming describes social power relations. By comparing exhibition titles and themes in three different museums in BiH and relating them to political, economic, and other social transformations, I aim to describe the points of view that guide the museum makers' perceptions of reality and socially dominant conceptual frameworks (i.e., a set of norms, values, beliefs, etc.) (Charon 2010). By accentuating some aims, perspectives, and themes and neglecting other aspects of reality, ethnic, social, cultural, and other boundaries are illustrated (Fairclough & Wodak 1997). The choice of themes and titles of exhibitions defines reality, whilst through the communication of important symbols, and the naming of exhibition, we also learn the ideas and values that others want us to learn (Charon 2010).

This methodological approach is well suited for the analysis of explicitly pronounced objectives and themes, but is less suitable, however, for the analysis of tacit discourses (Boréus & Bergström 2005). The analysis based on the categorization and interpretation of the aims, themes, and titles of museum exhibition makes it possible to see the overall patterns and the changes over time, but the choice to concentrate on broad patterns is a bias in the same way that a researcher 'must concentrate on some things at the expense of others' (Charon 2010). However, it is in this context important to acknowledge that this is one way of analysing this issue and that there are other parameters that can be taken into account, such as the individuals involved in the historical development of the museums. For instance the personal choice and the interests of curators have an impact on the development of museums.

A diachronic analysis of exhibition themes and their titles makes it possible to call attention to the impetus of museums, to the processes of nation building, and to the elimination of past collective identities. It is interesting to study not only how things remain the same but also how things change over time and why (Hooper-Greenhill 1992). The main question raised is: How are the museums and thus the choices of exhibitions affected by political and other types of changes in BiH?

Making Sense of Museums and Historical Context

Museums have manifold functions, and the focus in this study is on national museums as institutions for the preservation and presentation of heritage and history. Generally speaking, museums are building spaces for the representation of the past in the present, and in these spaces ‘the authors (including artists, curators, designers, historians and producers) use narrative models to address “when, why, how, what and to whom things happened in the past”’ (Phillips 2010: 397).

National museums seek to transcend time-space boundaries, create and represent national and other identities, and imagine and realize national ambitions through a selection of material culture (Kaplan 1994; Knell 2011). Museums (re)produce the idea of common identities and differences, history, and geographic boundaries and are the institutions for the formation of collective identities as well as a ‘stage for the performance of myths of nationhood’ (Knell 2011: 5; Johansson & Hintermann 2010). However, even though national museums act ‘as manifestations of identity or sites for the contestation of identities’, museums also play different roles in different ideological and state settings (Macdonald 2003: 1-2). According to Eileen Hooper-Greenhill (1992) museums have to modify their perspectives in accordance to a social, cultural, economic and political context and the play of power.

Peter Aronsson (2011) distinguishes three different forms of states’ museum making. These forms are of course only typologies, meaning that states move across the different categories of museum constructions and narratives about nationhood. First, empires and conglomerate states (e.g., the United Kingdom, France, and Habsburg) often have a universalist approach and portray themselves as multicultural societies. For instance, the British Museum has the ambition to become one of the most important cultural institutions of the world and give ‘the best single introduction to world cultures and civilisations that exists today’ (Hughes 2011: 201). Second, smaller countries with a long history of nation building (e.g., Sweden, Portugal) define the nation as a long-lasting entity, going far back in history, while at the same time downplaying their imperial past and instead displaying their scientific and aesthetic accomplishments in museum spaces. In these states, museums do not play an important part in nation building. Third, in new emerging nation-states, such as Germany, the Balkan states, and the Baltic states, it is common to explicitly and in a straight forward way represent the national narrative. Analogously, one important building block is a specific and often highly nationalistic national narrative. Aronsson (2011:47) holds that these states often have ‘the most conscious and explicit national narrative, precisely because of the short history of these states’.

Bosnian and Herzegovinian Historical Context

BiH was a part of the Ottoman Empire until the Congress of Berlin in 1878, when the Austrian-Hungarian Empire obtained its administration. The Ottoman Empire allowed BiH to preserve its territorial integrity from the 15th century, while it induced changes in the ethno-cultural (i.e., language, migration, and architecture), political, and religious character of the region (Solem 1997). Many inhabitants of BiH converted to Islam, and the Slavic-speaking Muslim community, today called Bosniaks, is now the largest ethno-religious group in BiH. The region was, and still is, ethnically and religiously diverse, including Catholics, Muslims, Christian Orthodox, and Jews. Sharenkova (2011), Alić and Gusheh (1999), and Helms (2008) underline that the historical and geographical position of the Balkan countries means that people living in the region identify themselves and have been identified with Europe and the Orient as well as East and West.

After World War I, ideas of unification of the South Slavic peoples led to the creation of the Kingdom of the Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes (after 1929 renamed the Kingdom of Yugoslavia). The roots of so-called Yugoslavism can be traced to the nineteenth century idea of pan-South Slavism. According to Andrew Wachtel (1998), the period between 1918 and 1939 was characterized by religious, linguistic, and cultural differences between ethnic and religious groups, and Yugoslavian national solidarity and common identity (i.e., Yugoslavism) were uncommon amongst the less well educated. The Yugoslav-oriented cultural and political elite had a goal of fostering a common national identity. But it was not until the end of World War II and the creation of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia that a more pronounced, centralized state cultural policy was implemented (Wachtel 1998). Yet the resistance from six republics (Slovenia, Croatia, BiH, Montenegro, Serbia, and Macedonia) to central control from Belgrade meant that the creation of strong Yugoslav identity and common Yugoslavian cultural base was never actively endeavoured.

The primary political and cultural objective of the post-World War II Communist Party was the establishment of Yugoslavia as a secular, socialist, and independent state, balancing between the interests of the republics. Even though ethnic division, along the lines of religious and language differences, was regarded as dangerous, the novel socialist cultural policy did not dismiss the promotion of regional and ethnic interests and cultures (Majstorović 1980). Wachtel (1998: 148) argues that when analysing cultural and other forms of cooperation in the Second Yugoslavia, ‘one is struck by the fact that although they all talk about a need for unified socialist culture, there was very little cooperation’ across borders of republics. He concludes that the centralized project of Yugoslavism was in reality abandoned in the 1960s, leading to a further split along ethnic lines (Wachtel 1998).

In Second Yugoslavia, BiH symbolized ethnic mix, coexistence, and a multiculturalist stance and was promoted as an example of so-called ‘brotherhood and unity’, a highly endorsed slogan and ideology, which was related to the construction of a multi-ethnic Yugoslavia. According to Alić and Gusheh (1999: 12), the construction of BiH-identity was permeated by two competing narratives, namely BiH ‘as a symbol of a united Yugoslavia’, on the one hand, and the claim of ‘a unique cultural heritage distinct from the neighbouring states of Serbia and Croatia’, on the other hand.

The political, economic, ethnic, and other problems were brought to light after Tito’s death, and they escalated in the 1990s with parliamentary and constitutional crises, multi-party elections, and several wars (Dragović-Soso 2004). As a consequence of the break-up of Yugoslavia, the world witnessed the war in BiH (1992–1995) (Hoare 2010; Markowitz 2007). BiH is today a federal state organized into two ethnicized political entities: the Federation of BiH (primarily inhabited by Muslim Bosniaks and Catholic BiH-Croats) and the Republic of Srpska (primarily inhabited by Christian Orthodox BiH-Serbs). The new political, ethnic, and cultural system is, according to Fontana (2013: 452), ‘sustained by a fragile balance between a state-promoted vision of multiculturalism and coexistence, and equally legitimate calls for ethnic exclusiveness and separation’.

Reshaping the Narratives in the Museum Spaces

The National Museum of BiH

Ten years after the Congress of Berlin in 1878, when the Austro-Hungarian Empire obtained the administration of BiH, the National Museum (Landesmuseum) was inaugurated as a regional museum within the empire. It is the oldest cultural and scientific institution of this kind in BiH.² The first attempt to establish the museum was made in 1850 by Catholic priest and writer Franjo Jukic, who claimed that the motivation for his cultural work lays in the need to make the South Slavic peoples in general and Bosnians and Herzegovinians in particular aware of their ‘glorious’ and ‘heroic’ past, and he wanted to make them ‘proud’ of their cultural heritage (Jukic 1858: III-IV; Hajdarpasic 2000). Influenced by the ideas of emerging nationalistic discourses, Pan-Slavism, and the struggle for independence from the Ottoman Empire, Jukic advocated the consolidation of both South Slavic and Bosnian and Herzegovinian ethnic (‘national’) identities.

The establishment of the museum in 1888 followed the global boom of the musealization of heritage in the decades after 1870 (Lewis 1992; Macdonald 2003). The museum consisted of three departments—namely, the Department of Archaeology, the Department of Ethnology, and the Department of Natural Sciences—and a library (Donia 2006b). The purpose-built museum complex, which was finished in 1913, consisted of four buildings and a botanical garden. Behind

the establishment of the museum lay the Austrian-Hungarian political goal to preserve religious diversity of the region, to support BiH's indigenous cultural heritage, and to intensify the construction of the so-called 'Bosnian nation' (Lopasic 1981). By promoting the idea of *bosnjastvo* (Bosnian identity), the imperial government and museum curators tried to reduce Serbian and Croatian cultural, political, and territorial claims and interests.

During World War I, the museum was closed but was reopened after the war, when it functioned as a regional museum in the newly formed Yugoslavia.³ The period between the two World Wars meant for BiH, and thus the National Museum, the centralization of the power in the hands of the government of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, division of BiH in several regions called banovinas, and noticeable marginalization of the cultures of other ethnic groups, except Slovenes, Croats, and Serbs (Alić & Gusheh 1999; Donia 2006a; Ignjatovic 2010).⁴

After World War II and during the communist regime (1945–1992), the museum received tangible economic funding and was recognized as an institution of the utmost importance.⁵ Exhibitions such as 'The Traditional Costumes of Peoples of Yugoslavia', 'The Trees and Shrubbery of Yugoslavia', 'Yugoslavian Flora', and 'The Folk Art of Yugoslavia' are a few of many examples of the attempt of the museum to contribute to the construction of a Yugoslav identity and spreading of 'Yugoslavism'. The exhibitions also illustrate a *naturalization of culture*—that is to say, the ways culture and nature present, create, and accommodate the nation (Stoklund 1999).⁶ Ruzin (2000: 353) concludes that Yugoslavism was linked to discourses of 'brotherhood and unity', 'stating the ethnic and political similarity and inter-dependence of the peoples of Yugoslavia and overcoming the politics of their clashes and conflicts'. Paradoxically, Yugoslav identity was included in the census for the first time in 1961, and Yugoslavs were, de facto, a minority in Yugoslavia (Sekulic, Massey & Hodson 1994). Nevertheless, in the period between 1945 and 1992, many exhibitions were organised in cooperation with other museums in Yugoslavia (i.e., Zagreb, Ljubljana, Skopje, Belgrade). This challenges Wachtel's (1998) argument that there was very little cultural and other cooperation across the borders of republics.

In parallel to the narratives of Yugoslavia, the museum organized exhibitions which were to epitomize the culture and nature of BiH: 'The Fauna of Northern Bosnia', 'Bosnian and Herzegovinian Embroidery and Jewellery', 'The Life and Culture of Peasantry in Bosnia and Herzegovina', and the like.⁷ These, and similar exhibitions, illustrate the embodiment of a specific BiH identity and the geopolitical space of BiH.

Clearly, there was a fine balance between the articulation of Yugoslavism, on the one hand, and BiH-identity, on the other hand. On the bases of the lists of exhibitions and thematic analysis, it is not possible to draw the conclusion that Yugoslavism as a cultural and identity-forming policy started to fade in the 1960s, as stated by several researchers (Wachtel 1998; Haug 2012). On the contrary, Yugo-

slavia was a vital framework for exhibition producers' thematic choice during the existence of Second Yugoslavia, at least in the National Museum. At the same time, the thematic presence of BiH and the absence of references to individual ethnic and religious groups (i.e., Serbs, Bosnian Muslims, Croats, Jews, etc.) in the titles of exhibitions indicate that between 1945 and 1992, there was a tendency towards the construction of regional (Republic) and national identity, without the articulation of ethnicity and religion as a drawing card. This does not mean that different ethnic and religious groups were not featured in the actual exhibitions. This simply means that the cultures of specific ethnic and religious groups were not displayed in solitude, but together with other ethnic groups' cultures and as a part of a construction of hybrid and multiethnic identity of BiH and Yugoslavia (i.e., in exhibitions such as 'Bosnian and Herzegovinian Embroidery and Jewellery', 'The Life and Culture of Peasantry in Bosnia and Herzegovina', 'The Traditional Costumes of Peoples of Yugoslavia').

Paradoxically, in spite of the efforts to build Yugoslav identity, fewer than 10 percent of the population of BiH identified itself as Yugoslavs, and Bosnian and Herzegovinian identity, per se, did not exist as an option for ethnicity/nationality in the Yugoslavian census (Sekulic, Massey & Hodson 1994). Clearly, the National Museum did not have a strong identity-transforming effect and its mediating mechanism sustaining Yugoslavia did not slow its disintegration. In fact, museum institutions generally function as simply mediators.

The 1992-1995 war that caused the breakup of Yugoslavia also brought 'direct devastation and damage to the four buildings of the Museum complex and to the Botanical Garden'.⁸ The references to Yugoslavia are relegated to the post-1992 exhibitions, and instead BiH as a nation-state has emerged as the main signifier. Additionally, the shift towards religion and ethnicity as significant thematic frameworks signals new hierarchies and different identity constructing processes. For example, in cooperation with the Catholic Church in Sarajevo, the museum exhibited painted Easter eggs in 1997, and in 1999, the museum opened an exhibition entitled 'Bosnia and Islamic Culture in Europe'.⁹ In 2008, the museum opened an exhibition on religious artefacts, in association with the Catholic Parish of the Holy Trinity in Sarajevo.

Probably the most significant example of the rising importance of religion in the National Museum is the Sarajevo Haggadah, which had been the main exhibit item since 2002. The manuscript was written in the middle of the fourteenth century in northern Spain and it 'found its way to Sarajevo with Jews who were expelled during the Inquisitions' (Hajdarasic 2008: 114). Surprisingly, the manuscript was not publicly exhibited and did not have the role of the main exhibit item until after the war in the 1990s.

First, Hajdarasic (2008) argues that the Sarajevo Haggadah is exhibited in order to commemorate the victims of the Nazi Holocaust during World War II as well as to draw an analogy between the Holocaust as one of the most tragic events

of world history, on the one hand, and the horrific events of the war in the 1990s, on the other hand. In other words, by evoking images of the World War II anti-Semitism and genocide, an analogy is also made to the lack of international intervention to stop the war in BiH and the atrocities that were committed during the war. Actually, the term *ethnic cleansing* became an important part of the images of the war in BiH and it 'was the first international crisis during which the American foreign policy debate routinely invoked Holocaust imagery and analogies' (Steinweis 2005: 277). Second, the Haggadah exhibition illustrates the way in which the international community attempts to influence public culture and politics in the postwar BiH (Hajdarasic 2008: 116). Through the joint efforts of the UN Mission in BiH and international donors (Soros Open Social foundation, EU, Sida, etc.) the Haggadah was presented to the public in December 2002, and many international guests attended the opening ceremony. In the opening ceremony, Jacques Paul Klein, the UN special representative and the head of the UN Mission in BiH, described Sarajevo during the Ottoman Empire, when Sephardic Jewish refugees arrived as a result of the Inquisition in Spain, as a multicultural city 'that was a beacon to tolerance in Europe' (Hajdarasic 2008: 115). At large, Sarajevo has been described as a meeting point between different cultures and religions (Western Christianity, Eastern Orthodox Christianity, Judaism, and Islam), and the European Union has, in several projects, emphasized the significance of multiculturalism within the country (i.e., European Committee of the Regions—the Western Balkans, TACSO; TAIEX, Delegation of the European Union to Bosnia and Herzegovina etc.) (cf. Hajdarasic 2008; Alić & Gusheh 1999; Donia 2006a).

In spite of the resurgence of religion and ethnicity since the latest war as well as the emphasis on multiculturalism, it appears as if Serbian cultural and religious artefacts have been marginalized in the museum space. This state of affairs follows BiH's ethnic, economic, cultural, and political fragmentation (Berg 2012; Bieber 2000; Dahlman & Tuathail 2005).

Finally, the National Museum has had difficulties operating without international financial support.¹⁰ Since 1995, it has been the primary beneficiary of aid and development work because it is regarded as one of two museums in BiH 'with a national profile for all the different ethnic groups in the country' (Cultural Heritage without Borders 2005: 12). The economic support was provided because the international community wants to keep BiH a unified nation and because the Dayton Peace Agreement encourages the preservation and restoration of national monuments.¹¹ In spite of the support, the museum has been permanently closed since 4 October 2012, because the State Ministry of Civil Affairs, which had previously been responsible for the overhead costs of the museum, has not granted it economic support (Figure 1). Additionally, the representatives of the Republic of Srpska have refused to pay for the management of the museum.¹² Pavkovic (2000) argues that the Republic of Srpska has not fully accepted the central government of BiH and its efforts to establish an all-embracing national identity of BiH. Cor-

respondingly, Fontana (2013) points out that the political representatives of the Republic of Srpska have emphasized the importance of the protection of the cultural and national heritage, and the monuments of the Republic of Srpska, but rejected the financing of the common national monuments of BiH. This is not surprising, considering that the National Museum of BiH has neglected BiH-Serbian ethno-cultural heritage and the Republic of Srpska's interpretation of the past and has made an analogy between the genocide in World War II and the misdeeds committed by the BiH-Serbian army during the war in the 1990s. It seems as if the international community has been more concerned than the BiH-politicians about keeping the National Museum open.



Figure 1 The National Museum of BiH (Lozic 2013)

The Museum of the Republic of Srpska

The establishment of the museum followed the division of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, and thus the disintegration of BiH territory, into *banovinas* in 1929. The museum was established in Banja Luka in 1930 as the Ethnographic Museum of Vrbas Banovina, and its aim was to help the economic and cultural development of the newly established banovina and the city of Banja Luka, the preservation of the ethnographic culture of the region (traditional costumes and ancient items,

folk art, and handicraft), the strengthening of regional identity, and the consolidation of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia (Kulundzija 2010).¹³

After the end of World War II, the first thing done was to change the museum's name to the State Ethnographic Museum of Bosnian Krajina (a subregion of BiH, which roughly corresponds to Vrbas Banovina). Between 1945 and 1992, the museum workers concentrated on collecting, preserving, and making public items from the so-called People's Liberation War and the history of the communist party and its officials. In 1953, the museum was renamed the National Museum in Banja Luka, and in 1962, it received a new official name, the Museum of Bosnian Krajina. The museum was restructured into the following scientific departments in 1961: archaeology; culture and cultural history; ethnography and folklore; labour movement, national liberation war, and the construction of socialism as well as the nature of the Bosnian Krajina (Kulundzija 2010).

Thus, the museum continued to have a distinct regional character even in Second Yugoslavia. Additionally, the common thematic thread during this period was the remembrance, preservation, and making public of the items and important political and military figures from the so-called People's Liberation War and the history of the communist party (Kulundzija 2010). The images of shared destiny and common political interests (communist ideology), of military sacrifice and victory (i.e., the statues of political leaders and freedom fighters, flags and military equipment linking the communist party of Yugoslavia to the Partisans and the fight against Nazi German occupation, etc.), and of unified people who fought World War II were recurring exhibition themes. The National Liberation Army was given an epic dimension, and partisans were celebrated as the only liberating force and the military formation, which signified the union of all peoples living on the territory of Yugoslavia. The communist party was depicted at the same time as the solitary guardian of Yugoslav federation and its principals. The slogan 'Comrade Tito we swear to you, from your path we will not stray' was a part of this mobilization of people and the construction of a shared communist identity and ideology of 'brotherhood and unity' (Kulundzija 2010: 77). All this suggests that there was an underlying fear of disintegration and the necessity of communism for the peaceful and prosperous future of the country (cf. Ruzin 2000). Majstorović (1980) and Wachtel (1998) argue that one of the roles of the shared communist ideology, brotherhood-and-unity-Yugoslavism, was to shift the focus from national cultural borders and inspire contacts between the national/ethnic groups and cultures, something that would eventually lead to the disappearance of the so-called nationalist narrow-mindedness. It can be concluded that the museum followed the path that Aronsson (2011) relates to the national museums in new emerging nation-states, in the sense that the museum presents a nationalistic, simplistic, and often straightforward national history and tries to unite different groups and reconcile previous disagreements.

Furthermore, these central themes and ideological perspectives, together with the existence of the department of labour movement and not least the move of the museum into the premises of the Worker's Solidarity House in 1982 (Figure 2), symbolize the dominance of the communist regime and the Marxist interpretation of history. The liaison between cultural institutions and political goals implied the assertion of working-class cultures and the education of citizens in accordance to the socialist views of society (Majstorović 1980).



Figure 2 The Museum of the Republic of Srpska (Lozic 2013)

Alongside the construction of Yugoslav and communist identity, the museum underlined the regional cultural heritage, and the remembrance of ostensibly significant figures from the region ('Bosnian Krajina, 1945–1985' from 1986; 'Postal Communication in Bosnian Krajina' from 1989; 'The Women of Bosnian Krajina in World War II and during the Rebuilding' from 1962) (Kulundzija 2010). Subsequently, the museum was an important space for the construction of regional identity and new socialist men and women.

In November 1992 the newly established government of the Republic of Srpska pronounced that the museum was 'the central museum in the Republic of Srpska'; the name was changed into the Museum of the Republic of Srpska, and Banja Luka became the administrative centre of the new republic (Kulundzija 2010: 89).¹⁴ The establishment of this new entity and the name-change of the museum, together with the expulsion of the non-Serbian population from the region

and the removal of statues and other symbols, which were associated with the previous regime, from the museum space, are few of several examples of the comprehensive institutional and other changes, a weakening of pre-war ‘brotherhood and unity’ discourses and the strengthening of the secessionist policies of the Republic of Srpska (cf. Berg 2012; Bieber 2000).

Hence, ever since the outbreak of the 1992 war, the interest of the museum has been directed towards Serbian culture and religious objects. The point of departure was the exhibition ‘Serbian Traditional Clothing in Bosnian Krajina’ in 1993 (Kulundzija 2010). Soon after that, the term ‘Bosnian Krajina’ was removed from the museum settings and discourses and was replaced by the adjective ‘Serbian’. The exhibition was followed by the one-hundred-year anniversary of the publication of the first Serbian ethnographic anthology and a few other anniversaries that celebrated the works of influential Serbian intellectuals.

In the following decade, due to the emergent interest in religion, the museum held the exhibition ‘Icons—Reflection on the 800th anniversary of Hilandar Monastery’ in 1999, and in 2006, the museum accommodated ‘Survival in Kosovo—the Restoration of the Sacred’ (Kulundzija 2010: 92-97). As a part of the thematic promotion and the actual preservation of Serbian cultural heritage, an exhibition was organized in 2009 that aimed to ‘protect’, ‘conserve’, and ‘present’ to the public Serbian Orthodox religious artefacts (Kulundzija 2010: 126). The artefacts came from Serbian communities in BiH where Human Rights Watch (1993) reported the maltreatment of BiH-Serbs. In 2005 attention was paid to the 130th anniversary of ‘Serbian Uprising in Bosnia, 1875–1878’ (against the Ottoman Empire), and thus metaphorically linked these events to the 1992–1995 war.¹⁵

Following the thematic reorientation towards Serbian ethnicity and religious perspectives and towards the cultural and military history of the Republic of Srpska, the history of Bosniaks and Islam, and of the history of BiH as an independent and unified state has been omitted from the museum. This silencing of Bosniaks is consistent with the consequences of the latest war, when ‘all of the city mosques’ and a large number of Roman Catholic churches in the Banja Luka area were destroyed as ‘a signal for the expulsion’ of non-Serbs (Riedlmayer 2002: 118; Sells 2003: 314). However, the significance of the Catholic order of Trappists (the Order of Cistercians of the Strict Observance) was recognized in an exhibition from 2009, and the members of the order were praised for their importance to the ‘economic development of the city during the past one hundred years’ (Kulundzija 2010: 124).

The struggle over religious/ethnic symbolism and the interpretation of the past articulates both ethnic inclusion and exclusion and the fact that the museum has a formative and reflective role in the society. In the museum, Christianity (particularly the Serbian Orthodox Church) is seen as the foremost religious carrier of the cultural heritage of the region. Museums, such as the Museum of the Republic of Srpska, have the power to highlight certain artefacts, monuments, and historical

narratives, while others are banished to oblivion. It could be argued that ‘in order to remember some things properly we have to forget others’, and the articulation/remembrance of the expulsion of Bosniaks ‘could bring a threat to national cohesion and self-image’ (Peralta 2009: 105; Misztal 2009: 118). Remembering and forgetting are not opposites; instead they are an integral part of identity construction (Lozic 2010).

As an institution for the preservation of the heritage of the Republic of Srpska and as a memorial space for Serbian collective identity, the museum also has the vital responsibility to maintain the remembrance of Jasenovac, which is today part of the permanent exhibition.¹⁶ Jasenovac was the site of the largest death camp in the Independent State of Croatia during World War II, and just before the war in the 1990s it became a site of war on a symbolic level and of disputes over the interpretation of history (Denich 1994; Kolstø 2010; Radonic 2011).

It is plausible that by maintaining the remembrance of the Serbian uprising against the Ottoman Empire in the same museological space as the remembrance of Jasenovac, the conceptual link between the atrocities during World War II and the presumed tyranny of the Islamic Ottoman Empire on the one hand and the events during the war in the 1990s on the other hand is established (cf. Rosenberg 2011). In other words, Jasenovac symbolizes both the experiences during World War II and the expulsion of Serbs from Kosovo, Croatia, and BiH during the conflicts in the 1990s.

Taking this implication further, the National Museum of BiH and the Museum of the Republic of Srpska operate so as to support the ethnic and religious claims of two different groups and thus two diametrically different interpretations of the war in the 1990s. On the one hand, the National Museum places an emphasis on the Bosnian Croatian and Bosniak Muslim communities of the state and uses the Sarajevo Haggadah to draw a parallel between World War II, the Bosnian Serb army’s misdeeds during the 1990s war, and the multicultural stance and the openness of the Ottoman Empire and BiH. On the other hand, the Museum of the Republic of Srpska promotes Serbian nationalism and uses the images of the World War II genocide in a different context. The representations of Jasenovac and Haggadah demonstrate that ‘material things have no essential identity, that meaning is not constant, and that the processes of “keeping and sorting” [...] have not remained the same’ because ‘other aspects of the social shift around them’ (Hooper-Greenhill 1992:196). Following Mendel and Steinberg’s (2011:207) argument about Israeli-Palestinian museums, it would be reasonable to conclude that ‘museological sites can be seen as both revealing and perpetuating the internal political situations: inter-political rivalries, militaristic values and discourse, and the international battle over legitimization’. Hence, the construction of national narratives in BiH museums resembles the disagreements over the representation and the use of history in other parts of the world, such as Cyprus (Papadakis 1994) and Israel (Mendel & Steinberg 2011).

The History Museum of BiH

The assembly of the Socialist Republic of BiH decided in November 1945 to establish the Museum of National Liberation as an institution under the direct control of the Ministry of Education (Kaljanac 2010: 7). The aim of the museum was

[t]o collect, preserve and display all documents related to the course and development of the national liberation fight and its achievements; to collect, study and present to the public all source materials, which relate to the history of the national liberation war, and to preserve and cherish the remembrance of national heroes and victims of fascism, of the heroism and devotion of our people during the liberation war. (Kaljanac 2010: 7)

In the period 1945-1992, the museum aimed to demonstrate ‘the leadership of the communist party of Yugoslavia, for planning and leading the National Liberation War in BiH, and the party’s efforts for the creation of unity amongst the participants of the uprising and the brotherhood and unity of the peoples’ (Karačić 2012: 32). This emphasis on the events during and the consequences of World War II, as interpreted by the communist regime, and the presumed ethnic/national cohesion in the fight against the fascism are reflected in the original name of the museum, namely, the Museum of National Liberation in Sarajevo. Similarly, in accordance to the statute of the museum from 1979, the aim was the systematic research and collection of the artefacts from the history of revolutionary labour movement, the struggle for national liberation and the socialist revolution, and the development of self-managing socialist society in BiH (Otašević & Kojović 1987).

During the first two decades of its existence, the museum moved several times into different buildings, and it took almost two decades until a permanent solution was found. Since 1963, the museum has been located in a purpose-built building (Figure 3).



Figure 3 The History Museum of BiH (Lozic 2013)

In 1967, the name of the museum was changed to the Museum of Revolution of BiH, while the current name, the History Museum of BiH, was officially given in the midst of the 1992-1995 war in June 1993. The latest name change implied a shift in the thematic perspective, and the museum widened its scope of work to include the history of BiH from the arrival of the Slavs to the Balkans to the formation of the so-called 'modern and independent' BiH (Kaljanac 2010: 17). Simultaneously, the geographical horizon became narrower.

Consequently, the pre-1990s period was dominated by numerous exhibitions about battles held in the territory of BiH during World War II; the history of the workers' movement and socialist revolution; the history of the communist party of Yugoslavia and its BiH branch; as well as, the post-war socialist developments until the 1960s. At the time, the geographical horizon included both BiH and Yugoslavia. The museum played a role in the legitimization of the communist rule, focusing on linking the partisan movement to the communist party and emphasizing its role in the liberation from Nazi Germany. For instance, the slogans, such as 'Death to fascism, freedom to the people', were in the museum exhibitions and within its first programme declaration used to define the communist party and the partisans as the only liberating forces during World War II (Kaljanac 2010). Similar to the Museum of the Republic of Srpska, the National Liberation War was used even in the History Museum as a symbol of unity of different ethnic groups in Yugoslavia, in general, and BiH, in particular.

The first exhibition organized in the midst of the 1992–1995 war was opened in July 1993 under the name 'Sarajevo's War Pictures'. During the following two decades, the museum organized exhibitions such as 'The Paper Money in BiH from 1918 until Present Day', 'Fleur-de-lis in Medieval Bosnia' (Golden Lilies were, in the 1990s, used as a symbol of an independent BiH), 'A Hundred Years of the Trade Union Movement in BiH', 'BiH through the Centuries', 'Ban [noble title, ruler] of Bosnia', 'Fragments of Sarajevo', and 'Besieged Sarajevo' (Kaljanac 2010).¹⁷ The objectives of the latter two exhibitions were to describe the destruction during the latest war (1992–1995) – that is to say, portray life under war conditions, the images of ostensible heroism, and the 'strength, resourcefulness, persistence of the citizens of this country to survive' (Kaljanac 2010: 53). Behind the narratives about the 'suffering of citizens, uricide [violence against the city] and the life in the period 1992–1995', there is a need to evoke and preserve images of war and struggle for independence as well as to induce an emotional reaction amongst the visitors (Kaljanac 2010: 54). Simultaneously, the BiH-Serbian army and the Republic of Srpska are seen as responsible for the events during the war.

Thus, the breakup of Yugoslavia meant that the museum had to change its path, but it had inherited artefacts and museums space, which it had to relate to in a new way. Following Sharenkova's (2011) and Aronsson's (2011: 40) arguments, it is plausible to conclude that despite the changes and crises following the 1992-1995-war in BiH, there is 'a certain stability and inertia' in the development of the mu-

seum and its representation of the past. In other words, since the proclamation of independence, the central themes have continued to be the history of BiH, in general, and military history, in particular, but Yugoslavia has been removed as a framework. Continuity is also evident in the pronounced interest in Titoism, the communist era, and artwork produced during the communist history of BiH (i.e., ‘Treasures of Socialism’ from 2011, ‘Tito in BiH’ from 2008).¹⁸

Today, the History Museum functions as a memorial space for the most recent war and a place which strives to construct a BiH-unitary identity while still reawakening the images of the communist past. Despite the fact that the Parliament of BiH has proclaimed the museum as an institution of public interest, the museum has had difficulties in its operation and was temporarily closed during the winter of 2012 because of the lack of financial support from the state institutions (Kaljanac 2010).¹⁹ The problems, which follow the post-1990s-war history of both museums in Sarajevo, are indicative of the state of BiH and the difficulties cultural institutions encounter in their effort to preserve and promote a common cultural heritage, to find a common language to describe the latest war, and to gather all parts of BiH around a common vision for the past and the future (cf. Fontana 2013).

Conclusion

According to Aronsson (2011), many nations strive to institutionalize cultural heritage and invest in the musealization of culture and heritage. However, as far as BiH is concerned, the situation is still ambiguous. First, ever since the independence, the National Museum and the History Museum have constantly faced the threat of closure due to the political brawl over which government department should finance them and whether the Republic of Srpska would contribute to the financing. The musealization of heritage and culture requires sustainable financial recourses, stable government, and a cohesive vision of the future, something that seems to be lacking in contemporary BiH. Noticeably, the current state of both museums, and particularly the National Museum, does not fit into Aronsson’s (2011) museum typology, because contemporary BiH, in spite of its being a new emerging nation-state, is still not a consolidated state. It looks as if there is hardly any room for a universal national narrative and an all-inclusive national museum of BiH supported by both political entities. Instead the museum and cultural institutions that emphasize the preservation and enclavization of cultures and national interests seem to flourish (cf. Fontana 2013).

Second, the present situation is diametrically opposite to the pre-1990s war position of the museums. For example, during the Austrian-Hungarian Empire, which established the National Museum in 1888, the museum played an important part in the negotiation and consolidation of Bosnian identity (*bosnjastvo*). In spite of the problems between the two World Wars, the National Museum of BiH and

the Museum of the Republic of Srpska participated in the representation of the history of the union of South Slavs while maintaining their regional character. After World War II, all three museums analysed here were summoned to interpret the contemporary past in accordance with the guidelines of the communist regime. The History Museum of BiH and the Museum of the Republic of Srpska, together with the National Museum of BiH, played an important part in the representation of Yugoslavism, in the legitimization of the communist system and Titoism, and in the downplaying of ethnic and religious differences, while still fostering BiH-identity. All three museums played a part in the construction of the 'socialist person', who would embody communist ideology and the dogma of 'brotherhood and unity'. Due to the short history of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and the communist regime, all three museums explicitly and consciously defined the national narrative and the vision of the future, and this along the lines of communist ideology. Consequently, between 1945 and 1992, all three museums followed the same uniform path of national history narration, which is, according to Aronsson (2011), indicative of new emerging nation-states.

The political changes in the 1990s have resulted in a new political, cultural, social and economic era for former communist countries (Sharenkova 2011), and the historical account of the three museums exemplifies these processes. As for the museums analysed here, their geographic scope has shrunk and the age of more or less undisputed and uniform narration of national history seems to have stalled. Hooper-Greenhill (1992:191) holds that '[n]ot only is there no essential identity for museums, [...] but such identities as *are* constituted are subject to constant change'. The museums in contemporary BiH have put the history of Yugoslavia aside, and today they accentuate a new regional/national identity, and ethnicity and religion as important identity markers. Additionally, because the National Museum of BiH and the History Museum, on the one hand, and the Museum of the Republic of Srpska, on the other hand, display different and contradictory historical narratives, they also make visible ethnic and other divisions in the country and a very explicit and highly ethnicized process of identity building.

At the Museum of the Republic of Srpska, the traumas from World War II and the suffering of the Serbian population in the most recent history are incorporated into the public display of history. The silencing of narratives about the communist past and the exodus of the non-Serbian population from the region around Banja Luka during the latest war is also a part of the collective suppression of memory in the museum space. The feeling of historic amnesia is strengthened by the absence of the narratives about BiH as a territorial whole. The common denominator, for the National Museum of BiH and the History Museum, is that they more or less explicitly blame the BiH-Serbian Army for the events during the war in the 1990s while they ostracize the BiH-Serbian population from the representation of the contemporary history of BiH. Neither of the two museums in Sarajevo discusses the fact that the inhabitants of the Federation of BiH and the Republika

Srpska are ‘forced to live together in a common state whose legitimacy is not recognised by its constituent peoples’ (Berg 2012: 1292). Instead, there is a desire to maintain BiH as a unified state, with the specific history, which can be traced to the Middle Ages.

To conclude, Fontana (2013:462) argues that BiH is moving towards ‘a new corporate culture in which parallel, rather than intersecting, histories and heritages are emphasized and preserved and in which evidence of hybridity and intermixing is dismissed’. According to her, the evidence for this lies in the closure on the National Museum and the History Museum, because they have tried to balance between narrow ethnocentric historical representations and the representation of BiH as a multicultural society. I would argue, however, that even these museums follow an ethnocentric representation of history, which excludes the interpretation of history by the Republic of Srpska. All three museums choose what to highlight and what not to say, and they choose their themes and interpretations of the past.

Fragmentation, segregation, and politicization of all spheres of BiH society, including the three museums analysed here, together with opposing ideologies, hatred, and mistrust amongst different groups and politicians make cohesion through the institutions of cultural heritage a demanding task. If an agreement about the future of BiH and its history is to be reached, a step towards multi-vocal historical narratives has to be made from both sides (cf. Papadakis 1994; Mendel & Steinberg 2011). Rosenberg holds that, museums have ‘the capacity to enhance social cohesion’ as well as ‘widen divisions’, something that is in my mind evident in the BiH-museums analysed here (Rosenberg 2011: 115).

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Notes

- ¹ The current study has been financed by and conducted within the Eunamus-project, a three-year research project funded under the Seventh Framework Programme of the European Commission.
- ² Zemaljski muzej, 'Osnivanje muzeja', www.zemaljskimuzej.ba/o_nama/osnivanje_muzeja.php (accessed 20/08/13).
- ³ Zemaljski muzej, 'Development of the museum', www.zemaljskimuzej.ba/o_nama/razvoj_muzeja-en.php (accessed 20/08/13).
- ⁴ Zemaljski muzej, 'Development of the museum', www.zemaljskimuzej.ba/o_nama/razvoj_muzeja-en.php (accessed 20/08/13).
- ⁵ Zemaljski muzej, 'Development of the museum', www.zemaljskimuzej.ba/o_nama/razvoj_muzeja-en.php (accessed 20/08/13).
- ⁶ Zemaljski muzej, 'Museum activities of the natural history department (1888-2008)', http://www.zemaljskimuzej.ba/prirodne_nauke/aktivnosti-en.php (accessed 20/08/13).
- ⁷ Zemaljski muzej, 'Museum activities of the natural history department (1888-2008)', http://www.zemaljskimuzej.ba/prirodne_nauke/aktivnosti-en.php (accessed 20/08/13).
- ⁸ Zemaljski muzej, 'Development of the museum', www.zemaljskimuzej.ba/o_nama/razvoj_muzeja-en.php (accessed 20/08/13).
- ⁹ Zemaljski muzej, 'Museum Activities of the Ethnology Department (1888-2008)', www.zemaljskimuzej.ba/etnologija/aktivnosti-en.php (accessed 20/08/13).
- ¹⁰ Zemaljski muzej Bosne i Hercegovine, 'Development of the museum', www.zemaljskimuzej.ba/o_nama/razvoj_muzeja-en.php (accessed 26/08/13).
- ¹¹ Law on Implementation of Decisions of the Commission to Preserve National Monuments, Year IX – No. 2, Monday 21 January 2002, Pursuant to Article IV. B. 7. a) (IV) of the Constitution of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina http://kons.gov.ba/main.php?id_struct=83&lang=4 (accessed 26/08/13).
- ¹² Radio Slobodna Evropa, 'Zemaljski muzej devet mjeseci pod ključem: Čekajući odluku suda', <http://www.slobodnaevropa.org/content/zemaljski-muzej-devet-mjeseci-pod-kljucem/25036256.html> (accessed 26/08/13).
- ¹³ Muzej Republike Srpske, 'O nama – Licna karta muzeja Republike Srpske', <http://www.muzejrs.com/about-museum,2.html> (accessed 26/08/13).
- ¹⁴ Muzej Republike Srpske, 'O nama – Licna karta muzeja Republike Srpske', <http://www.muzejrs.com/about-museum,2.html> (accessed 26/08/13).
- ¹⁵ Bratislav Teinović, Muzej Republike Srpske, 'Serbian Uprising in Bosnia 1875-1878', <http://muzejrs.academia.edu/BratislavTeinovi%C4%87/Books>; <http://www.muzejrs.com/ictopija-umjethocti-i-ppaictopijcka-apxeologija,23.html> (accessed 26/08/13).
- ¹⁶ Muzej Republike Srpske, 'Jasenovac', <http://www.muzejrs.com/%D0%88%D0%B0%D1%81%D0%B5%D0%BE%D0%B0c,90.html> (accessed 2/07/12).
- ¹⁷ Historiski muzej BiH, 'Arhiva – Paralele kulturne spona', <http://www.muzej.ba/index.php?lang=ba&sel=3> (accessed 9/4/14).
- ¹⁸ Historiski muzej BiH, 'Arhiva – Paralele kulturne spona', <http://www.muzej.ba/index.php?lang=ba&sel=3> (accessed 9/4/14).
- ¹⁹ Al Jazeera Balkans, Video, 'Zatvoren Historijski muzej BiH', 5 January 2012, <http://balkans.aljazeera.net/video/zatvoren-historijski-muzej-bih> (accessed 21/08/13).

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