

From revolution to nation: transformation of historical museums in (post-)Yugoslav Croatia and Serbia

Milica Popović, Nataša Jagdhuhn

Looking at three museums: in Zagreb – Croatian History Museum –, and in Belgrade – Historical Museum of Serbia and Museum of Yugoslavia –, we analyze institutional narrative shifts during the dissolution of the country and the Yugoslav wars, and since 2010 till today. Using critical discourse analysis, embedded in memory studies, we analyze museums' websites, and catalogues, complemented with ethnographic visits. While in the socialist Yugoslavia national historical museums had limited impact, during the 1990s they became actors of conflict narratives in the war-affected States, focusing on exhibitions reinforcing ethno-nationalist discourses, preserving the same narrative to the present. On the contrary, the Museum of Yugoslavia serves as an example of ambivalent politics towards socialist heritage, placing itself as a paradoxical hegemonic counter-memory actor.

Keywords: Museums, (post-)Yugoslav, (Ethno)nationalism, Yugoslav wars, Socialist heritage.

Parole chiave: Musei, Territorio (post)Jugoslavia, Nazionalismo etnico, Guerre jugoslave, Retaggio socialista.

Introduction

The paradigm shift in the aftermath of socialist Yugoslavia, towards what Boris Buden¹ terms the «post-communist discourse», shares both convergences and divergences between Croatia and Serbia, each marked by their own role in the Yugoslav wars and their specific transitional trajectories. Croatia declared independence in 1991, in parallel with the declaration of autonomy of Republic Srpska Krajina, marking the beginning of the war. The war was officially declared over in 1995, with the peaceful reintegration of Eastern Slavonia, Baranja and Western Srijem marking the final scene in 1998. In 2000, the regime change marked a shift from ethno-nationalism under President Franjo Tuđman into liberal-conservative pro-European nationalism², leading to Croatia entering the European Union in 2013. During the Nineties, Serbia equally experienced an ethno-nationalist authoritarian regime under Slobodan Milošević, yet Milošević's regime used the discourse of its alleged pro-Yugoslav orientation as a justification for its war mongering and aggress-

¹ B. Buden, *Zona prelaska: O kraju postkomunizma*, Fabrika knjiga, Beograd 2012.

² D. Jović, *Turning nationalists into EU supporters: the case of Croatia*, in *The Western Balkans and the EU: 'the hour of Europe'*. *Chaillot Paper 126*, ed. J. Rupnik, European Union Institute for Security Studies (Euiass), Paris 2011, pp. 33-45.

sor politics³. When the regime change finally occurred in 2000, the new democratic government brought a strong(er) dissociation from the socialist Yugoslav past, and with it a historical revisionist wave. Another change of government in 2012, bringing back the political figures from the Nineties, only strengthened the (neo)nationalist discourses. Throughout the (post-)Yugoslav space, erasing Yugoslav identity became a condition for the creation of (new) ethno-national identities and a way of legitimizing the wars of the Nineties and the dissolution of the country⁴.

National history museums existed in socialist Yugoslavia, but they were barely visible to the public and rarely at the forefront of historical narratives and public activities. This is well illustrated by the words of the, then and present, curator of the Historical Museum of Serbia Nebojša Damjanović: «in Yugoslavia, we were a museum on the seventh floor of the building of the Executive Council»⁵. The socialist regime's priorities were the Museums of the Revolution (MoR) representing the history of the individual republics and regions, primarily as the history of class struggle⁶. With the dissolution of the country and the end of the socialist regime, the MoR have lost their epistemological base⁷. In Croatia in 1991, the MoR of the Peoples of Croatia was integrated with the Historical Museum of Croatia to form a new museum: the Croatian History Museum (CHM). In Serbia it was only in 1996 that the MoR of Yugoslav Nations and Ethnic Minorities merged with the collections from the Memorial Centre Josip Broz Tito forming the new Museum of Yugoslav History, renamed Museum of Yugoslavia (MY) in 2017. And in 2005, the former building of the MoR in Belgrade was taken over by the Historical Museum of Serbia (HMS), symbolically marking the taking over of the new hegemonic discourses.

This article presents the shifting narratives in the (post-)Yugoslav space and institutional transformations of historical museums in Zagreb (Croatia) and Belgrade (Serbia) at two points in time: first, the late Eighties and early Nineties – the times of the dissolution of Yugoslavia, and second, from 2010 to today, the decade in which Croatia entered the European Union (EU) and in which Serbia had another governmental change, reverting back to much of the political panorama of the Nineties. Through the analysis of both institutional and narrative fluctuations, the article responds to two key questions: how were the nascent nationalisms reflected in the historical museums and what was their role in the creation of new collective

³ J. Rupnik, *Risques et limites d'un retour du nationalisme en Serbie*, in «Critique internationale», n. 4, 2004, pp. 29-42.

⁴ V.P. Gagnon, *The Myth of Ethnic War: Serbia and Croatia in the 1990s*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca, 2004.

⁵ The quote is from the exhibition of Nebojša Damjanović from the conference *1945-2015: museological apologies of (dis-)continuity* held at the Museum of the Second Avnoj Session in Jajce 2015. On the problem of the decades-long struggle of the Historical Museum of Serbia, see M. Đoković, *Istorijski muzej Srbije- Jedan uvaženi beskućnik*, in «Zbornik Istorijskog Muzeja Srbije», n. 17-18, 1981, pp. 237-242.

⁶ About the Museum of the Revolution, the concept and the institution, see: N. Jagdhuhn, *Post-Yugoslav Metamuseums: Reframing Second world war Heritage in Postconflict Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia*, Palgrave Macmillan, Cham 2022, p. 44.

⁷ See ead., *Jugoslavizacija muzejskog polja*, in «Zbornik Istorijskog Muzeja Bosne i Hercegovine», n. 12, 2017, pp. 11-19.

memories? And what role did the historical museums take in the stabilization of ethno-nationalist hegemonic discourses in the post socialist decades after 2010? The key claim of the article is that while in the socialist Yugoslavia national historical museums had limited impact, during the Nineties they became central actors of conflict narratives in the war-affected States, focusing on exhibitions reinforcing ethno-nationalist discourses and continuing today to transmit ethno-national victimization discourses as founding myths. State museums as one of the constitutive pillars of the official memory politics are embedded in the renationalizing efforts of the (post-) Yugoslav States⁸. The executive powers decide on their leadership; the State regulations decide on the museum curators' qualifications; and these institutional decisions and dependencies translate in the discursive harmonies with the official narratives making museums par excellence actors of the State⁹. Regardless, the national history museums are left with a "margin de maneuver". In both opposing and aligning with these politics, the Museum (of History) of Yugoslavia serves as an example of an ambivalent position vis-à-vis the socialist heritage in Serbia and as a counter case study to the two national historical museums. As such, it places itself as a paradoxical hegemonic counter-memory actor and through these narrative dissonances, it shows us that regardless of the hegemonic political discourses, museums can retain agency under specific circumstances of heterogeneity of memory politics.

For our enquiry into the narrative and institutional shifts, the most productive approach was to use Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) as a «normative and explanatory critique»¹⁰, through a hermeneutic process, interwoven in the qualitative interpretative analysis framed by memory studies. Given the transtemporal frame, the collected data were the museums' websites, proceedings¹¹ and exhibitions' catalogues (see Table 1): the texts remaining present longer than the transient exhibitions themselves. Using the complementary methods of interdiscursive and linguistic analysis, the text and the images are seen as means for the articulation of ideological positions¹². Concurring with Kress and van Leeuwen¹³ that we must look

⁸ T.P. Trošt, L. David, *Renationalizing Memory in the Post-Yugoslav Region*, in «Journal of Genocide Research», n. 2, 2021, pp. 228-240.

⁹ For further examples in the (post-)Yugoslav space, see for North Macedonia: N. Trajanovski, *Operacijata muzej: muzej na makedonska borba i makedonska politika na sećavanje*, Templum, Skopje 2020; id., *Operation Museum: Memory Politics as 'Populist Mobilization' in North Macedonia (2006-2011)*, in *Memory Politics and Populism in Southeastern Europe*, ed. J. Jensen, Routledge, London 2021; for Bosnia and Herzegovina: V. Lozić, *(Re) Shaping History in Bosnian and Herzegovinian Museums*, in «Culture Unbound», n. 2, 2015, pp. 307-329; Dž. Šahović, D. Zulumović, *Obsolete Cultural Heritage in Post-Conflict Environments: The Case of Avnoj Museum in Jajce, Bosnia Herzegovina*, in «Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies», *Conflicts of Heritage in the Balkans and the Near East*, eds. C.M. Constantinou, O. Demetriou, M. Hatay, n. 2, 2012, pp. 245-262; J. von Puttkamer, *No future? Narrating the past in Bosnian history museums*, in «Nationalities papers», n. 5, 2016, pp. 789-803; and for Slovenia: K. Širok, *Remembering and Forgetting in Museum Narratives*, in *The Media of Memory*, eds. M. Pušnik, O. Luthar, Brill, Leiden 2020, pp. 43-62.

¹⁰ N. Fairclough, *Critical Discourse Analysis: The Critical Study of Language*, Routledge, London 2010, p. 4.

¹¹ Proceedings are herewith understood as *zbornici* in the Serbo-Croatian language.

¹² G. Kress, T. van Leeuwen, *Reading Images: The Grammar of Visual Design*, Routledge, London 2020.

¹³ *Ibid.*

not only into the relationships within the images, and the texts, but beyond the image to the social, cultural, historical, and political contexts, this article situates the historical museums within the wider historical and political frameworks in a dissolving socialist Yugoslavia, and subsequently Croatia and Serbia. The discourse embodied in narrative and institutional shifts of the historical museums in Croatia and Serbia was a result of the ideological shifts of hegemonic narratives, and the museums continued to serve as the mediated link between text and society.

In table 1, we present the collected data and the sources used for the analysis. Focus on the written texts and images, in online form, allowed for the stability of analysis in temporal terms. Several visits to the museums took place during 2012 and 2019, and we acquired some photographic notes which served as additional data for further analysis¹⁴.

Table 1: Data used for analysis

Institution	Type of data	Source
Croatian History Museum		
	Website	https://www.hismus.hr/hr/
	Website of the exhibition posters	https://izlozbeniplakati.hismus.hr/
	Website with publications	https://www.hismus.hr/hr/suvenirnica/publikacije/
Historical Museum of Serbia		
	Website	https://imus.org.rs/
	Website with publications and souvenirs	https://imus.org.rs/izdanja-i-suveniri/
Museum of Yugoslavia		
	Website	https://muzej-jugoslavije.org/

¹⁴ The following exhibitions were visited: Museum of Yugoslavia: *Yugoslavia from the beginning to the end* (2012); *NEO N.O.B.* (2013/2014); *They never had it better?* (2014/2015); *Re/cognition* (2016/2017); *Yuga, my Yuga – Gastarbeiter stories* (2016/2017); *The day worth a century – I XII 1918* (2018/2019); Croatian History Museum: '45 (2016); Historical Museum of Serbia: *In the name of the Peoples* (2014).

CHM has a number of digitalized documents including exhibition catalogues, yet none was produced after 2010. However, the website also provides virtual exhibitions and virtual walks of some of the more recent exhibitions, especially those produced since the museum closed to the public. HMS provides a rich website and an archive of resumes and titles of exhibitions since 2015. It does not provide any digitalized catalogues but does provide digitalized proceedings of the museum published between 1959 and 2003. The website of the MY provides the richest materials – not only the usual website sections on the history on the museum and technical information but also digitalized exhibition catalogues and accompanying publications; video materials of conferences and guiding tours of some of the exhibitions since 2016; a blog; list of numerous artifacts; a list of several new acquisitions and conservation works; as well as extensive photo archives. The misbalance of the available accessible digital text already provides for the first element of analysis, showing the diversity of approaches to the museums' website and digital presence, leaving MY as the most progressive one.

Museums' coming into (national) being and the name that must-not-be-spoken

All the analyzed museums are State-funded museums, and considered as the most important national history museums located in the capital city's (wider) center, easily accessible for tourists and locals likewise. However, CHM has been closed to the public since 22 March 2020, a consequence of the strong earthquake that significantly damaged the building and subsequent reconstruction which is planned to last until 2026.

Discursive representations of museums' histories uncover their representation of national histories, outlining their ideological positioning towards the nation making narratives. CHM in the section *About us*¹⁵ presents the photo of the historical building in which the museum is currently located and dates the continuity of the museum to pre-Yugoslav times – 1846, noting that in 1940 the museum «began to operate under the name Croatian National Historical Museum as an independent museum institution»¹⁶ and that in 1991, «a time of democratic change and the processes which led to independence for the Republic of Croatia»¹⁷, the existing Historical Museum and the Museum of the Revolution of the Peoples of Croatia were integrated into today's institution. Throughout the whole narrative of the museum's history, even if there are clear references to the institutions created in both monarchist and socialist Yugoslav times, there is not a single direct denomination of the word Yugoslavia.

Intertwined with references to the museum's mission, in the section *About us*¹⁸ of HMS, the founding stages of the museum are explained, accompanied with photos of

¹⁵Croatian History Museum, *About us*, <https://www.hismus.hr/en/about-us> [accessed 14 June 2024].

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Historical Museum of Serbia, *About us*, <https://imus.org.rs/en/about-us/> [accessed 14 June 2024].

several artifacts from the collections of royal insignia and objects from the royal families of Serbia, marking the link to the Karađorđević and Obrenović dynasties. The text explains that the first attempt to create a historical museum of Serbia in 1950 culminated in the 1954 foundation of the Museum of the First Serbian Uprising in Topčider, dealing with both uprisings (1804-1813 and 1815) as the constitutional events for the Serbian State. It further notes that «the insurrectionary-revolutionary milieu of the Uprisings was ideologically recognizable and acceptable to the authorities»¹⁹, demarcating a normative stand towards the socialist regime. It continues to explain that in 1963 HMS was established, incorporating the Museum of the Uprising(s), with the residence in Topčider as the only display space. As the text continues to elaborate on the museum's mission, competence and collections, international and national successes, it succeeds also in – as does its counterpart in Croatia – telling the story about its history without a single mention of the term of Yugoslavia. The significant absences of the name of Yugoslavia, together with the constructed continuity of diverse Yugoslav States, define the location of the discursive agents as being harmonized with the hegemonic narratives of anti-Yugoslav positionalities of the (post-)Yugoslav times²⁰.

Conversely, MY, as an institution that carries the Yugoslav name, has been given the role of narrating multiple histories of Yugoslavia, almost as a parallel history independent of the national narratives of Croatia and Serbia. The museum's website provides the history of the museum in multiple places – in the speech given by the director Dr Neda Knežević on the 25th anniversary of the museum²¹; in the text authored by several museum curators²² under the title *The origins: The background for understanding the Museum of Yugoslavia*²³; in the timeline of the interactive history of Yugoslavia and the museum²⁴ and in the section *About the Museum*²⁵.

The timeline, presenting juxtaposed histories of the museum and the history of Yugoslavia itself, marks the year 1959 as the founding year of the Museum of the Revolution of Yugoslav Nations and Ethnic Minorities. It further notes that in 1962, President Tito received, as a gift for his 70th birthday from the City of Belgrade, the building of the then-established May 25 Museum: a museum presenting numerous gifts the president received from abroad and within the country²⁶. In 1965, to house

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ B. Buden, *Zona prelaska: O kraju postkomunizma*, cit.

²¹ Museum of Yugoslavia, *On the occasion of the 25th anniversary of the Museum of Yugoslavia by Neda Knežević*, <https://muzej-jugoslavije.org/%d0%bf%d0%be%d0%b2%d0%be%d0%b4%d0%be%d0%bc-25-%d0%b3%d0%be%d0%b4%d0%b8%d0%bd%d0%b0-%d0%bc%d1%83%d0%b7%d0%b5%d1%98%d0%b0-%d1%98%d1%83%d0%b3%d0%be%d1%81%d0%bb%d0%b0%d0%b2%d0%b8%d1%98%d0%b5/> [accessed 14 June 2024].

²² Marija Vasiljević, Veselinka Kastratović Ristić and Momo Cvijović.

²³ Museum of Yugoslavia, *The origins: The background for understanding the Museum of Yugoslavia*, <https://muzej-jugoslavije.org/en/predistorija-osnova-za-razumevanje-muzeja-jugoslavije/> [accessed 14 June 2024].

²⁴ Museum of Yugoslavia, *Research*, <https://muzej-jugoslavije.org/en/istrazi/> [accessed 14 June 2024].

²⁵ Museum of Yugoslavia, *About the Museum*, <https://muzej-jugoslavije.org/en/o-nama/> [accessed 14 June 2024].

²⁶ The first official conference of the Non-aligned Movement was held in 1961 in Belgrade, Yugoslavia, an initiative heralded by Josip Broz Tito (Yugoslavia), Jawaharlal Nehru (India), Gamal Abder Nasser (Egypt), Kwame

all these gifts, the State built a depot (today called the Old Museum and opened to the public in 1987). Within the same complex, the House of Flowers was built as a winter garden in 1975; since 1980 it has served as the burial place of Tito, and since 2013 that of his wife Jovanka Broz. In 1982, the State reconfigured all these buildings and institutions into one complex: the Memorial Center Josip Broz Tito. In 1996, the Museum of Yugoslav History was founded by merging the collections of the Memorial Center and the Museum of the Revolution, presenting a new turn. Showing the photos of the buildings, exhibition designs, logos, and Tito himself, the timeline complements the images of power in the historical timeline above. Previous versions of the website elaborated that in 1997, the then President Slobodan Milošević usurped part of the property integrating it into his residence and consequently, during the NATO bombing of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia in 1999, it was destroyed²⁷: calling a symbolic destruction of the Yugoslav heritage into physical reality²⁸. While omitting the usurpation and destruction, the current text mentions an exhibition on the NATO bombing set immediately in the aftermath of the campaign, as well as the display of the remains of Slobodan Milošević, upon his death in 2006²⁹, keeping the third Yugoslav State within the historical framework of the museum while also making note of the Kosovo war that preceded the bombing – the most often omitted historical element in the hegemonic discourse. The timeline notes the year 2009 as a new beginning, the beginning of a different concept of the museum and the beginning of the work on the permanent exhibition, and the year 2016 when the research on the first Yugoslav State was introduced within the museum's field of interest. More importantly, 2016 brought the change of name from the Museum of History of Yugoslavia to the Museum of Yugoslavia³⁰. On the same page, in the section *History* just below the timeline, the text announces that the museum's collections became «a burden, unwanted witnesses of the past, traces of which were being thoroughly erased from the present»³¹. Confirming the orientation of the museum as presenting the continuity of Yugoslav ideas³², the text aligns with the hegemonic narratives of undermining the specificities of diverse political re-

Nkrumah (Ghana), and Sukarno (Indonesia). The years leading up to it, as well as the times of NAM, significantly impacted the rise of the rich diplomatic activities of President Tito and his numerous travels around the world, which have resulted in thousands of gifts received.

²⁷ Authors' notes from 2014.

²⁸ M. Popović, *Exhibiting Yugoslavia*, in «Družboslovne Razprave», n. 81, 2016, pp. 7-24.

²⁹ On the symbolical interplay of turning the museum into a mourning chapel, see O. Manojlović Pintar, A. Ignjatović, *National Museums in Serbia: A Story of Intertwined Identities*, in *Building National Museums in Europe, 1750-2010*, eds. P. Aronsson, G. Elgenius, Linköping University Electronic Press, Linköping 2011, pp. 779-815; and B. Jakovljević, *Politički performansi Slobodana Miloševića*, in *Peščanik*, 24 August 2016, <https://pescanik.net/politicki-performansi-slobodana-milosevica/> [accessed 08 August 2024].

³⁰ Museum of Yugoslavia, *Research*, <https://muzej-jugoslavije.org/en/istrazi/> [accessed 14 June 2024].

³¹ Ibid.

³² Monarchist: 1918 Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes; 1929 Kingdom of Yugoslavia; Socialist: 1943 Democratic Federal Yugoslavia; 1963 Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia; and Third: 1992 Federal Republic of Yugoslavia; 2003 Serbia and Montenegro.

gimes of Yugoslav history. Yugoslavism had multiple facets as intellectual and political ideas throughout history, impossible to be understood as part of the one and same political project – the monarchist capitalist society of the first Yugoslavia was built on the hegemony of the Serbian State through the dictatorship of Aleksandar Karađorđević, more similarly to the third Yugoslavia which was founded in the Serbian nationalist narratives of the authoritarian regime of Slobodan Milošević; both in stark contrast with the communist approach to Yugoslavism and multiplicity of ethno-national identities in the socialist Yugoslav State. Yet the official hegemonic discourses in Serbia insist on the continuity to reiterate the legitimacy of the wars of the Nineties. Despite this alignment with the continuity of the Yugoslav idea, the museum today formulates its role as an institution dealing with counter-memory³³, and providing alternative narratives.

History museums in the war

Serbia's commemoration of the 600 year anniversary of the Battle of Kosovo celebrated in 1989 in the context of the breakdown of Yugoslavia is remembered mainly because of the incendiary speech of Slobodan Milošević on *Gazimestan*³⁴, in which he “foresaw” and warned of the historical turning point at which federal Yugoslavia found itself. In this specific historic moment, «a discussion of the contemporary problems of Serbia was desired»³⁵, as the academic Sima Ćirković warned at the opening of the exhibition *The Kosovan Battle 1389* at the Historical Museum of Serbia. A month later, the exhibition *Serbia 1914* opened. The subject of the beginning of the First world war, according to historian Miroslav Đorđević³⁶, should have been a reminder of the enormous number of Serbs who died for the cause of the liberation and victory from which the creation of a common South Slav State resulted. Further claiming the relevance of this historical period for the present times, he stated:

The Yugoslav idea and the Yugoslav State have a continuity. The First Yugoslavia and the dates of its creation and emergence are being contested in order to contest and destroy this, our Yugoslavia of today. Today, therefore, our community, our Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia is being subjected to numerous trials. It has been very difficult for us, as a society, to come to an evaluation of the Federation's deep social and political crisis, although that crisis is more than obvious [...]. Today the Congress of the CK [Central Committee/Centralni Komitet] of Serbia started. Serbian communists will resolutely continue to carry out that for which they received a mandate for

³³ M. Foucault, *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca 2019.

³⁴ *Gazimestan* is a memorial site commemorating the Battle of Kosovo.

³⁵ S. Ćirković, *Govor akademika Sime Ćirkovića na otvaranju izložbe istorijskog muzeja Srbije 'Kosovska bitka 1389. godine'*, in «Zbornik Istorijskog Muzeja Srbije», n. 26, 1992, pp. 125-127, here p. 125.

³⁶ M. Đorđević, *Govor na otvaranju izložbe 'Srbija 1914. godine'*, in «Zbornik Istorijskog Muzeja Srbije», n. 26, 1992, pp. 141-143, here pp. 142-143.

from the whole nation – and that is the deep reform of Yugoslav socialism for the sake of creating from every perspective a society better than the one in which we currently live. Many masks have now fallen in our society – even those which are allegedly democratic, and many things are more visible. Separatism can no longer masquerade as democracy, bureaucratic arrogance as the rule of law. Because of that our struggle for reform and progress will be if anything but easy but it will be certainly much clearer – in the sense that we know who we are dealing with³⁷.

Dorđević's speech not only indicates the intention of the exhibition, which aimed to underline the importance of Serbian victims for the creation and continuity of Yugoslav statehood, but also reflects the socio-political atmosphere created by political and intellectual elites in Serbia shortly before the breakup of Yugoslavia. Especially at the end of the quote, this speech clearly depicts the already matured division into 'us' and 'them' that is, matured nationalist constructions of reality which were then already present in Serbia. Discourses of the political elites in the Nineties became a political instrument for strengthening national identity. First of all, there is the victimological discourse in the service of the national cohesion of society. The thematic subclusters of this discourse, such as 'independence', 'fearlessness' are supported by historical images of the 'experience of misfortune'. As a consequence, these museum narratives are imposing the belief in the collective national threat to peace and security.

Already in 1993, HMS produced exhibitions not only for and on the territory of Serbia but also, as the museum curator Borislav Šurdić emphasized – «in the Serbian lands on the territory of the former Yugoslavia»³⁸. For example, the exhibition *Serbia in the Balkan wars 1912-1913* was presented in what were at that moment self-proclaimed proto-States: Republika Srpska (Pale, Banja Luka, Bijeljina) and Republika Srpska Krajina (Knin); also, the same exhibition was shown in Kosovo (Priština, Peć and Leposavić). In the same year, the exhibition *Republika Srpska Krajina-the roots of the statehood and of its genesis* was organized in collaboration with the City Museum in Knin³⁹.

In 1994 the HMS focused mainly on collecting objects and maintaining the already existing exhibitions. However, in the same year, there was one exceptionally interesting initiative, which illustrated the trend towards the de-Yugoslavization of the museum sphere in Serbia. This concerns the engagement of the HMS in the preparation of a coming permanent exhibit with the memorial character of the Memorial house *Battle on Kadinjača*⁴⁰, which would bear the title *The Užice*

³⁷ Ivi, p. 142.

³⁸ B. Šurdić, *Izložbe Istorijskog muzeja u 1993. godini*, in «Zbornik Istorijskog Muzeja Srbije», n. 27, 1993, pp. 191-192, here p. 192.

³⁹ The exhibitions of the same year which were also produced by the History Museum of Serbia bore the following titles: *The weapons and equipment of the medieval Serbian warrior*, *Serbia and the Serbian nation 1941*, *The Serbian revolution 1804*, *The Toplica uprising 1917*.

⁴⁰ G. Ladević, *Istorijski muzej Srbije u 1994. godini*, in «Zbornik Istorijskog muzeja Srbije», n. 28, 1994, pp. 317-322, here p. 319.

army through history. It was planned that the exhibition dedicated to the Battle on Kadinjača should be supplemented with new pieces which related to the role of the Užice army in the Balkan wars and the First world war. Despite there being many other proponents of this idea, this project remains unrealized.

Historiographic texts published in the proceedings of the HMS in the mid-Eighties were still firmly framed by the Yugoslav political memory⁴¹. After 1992 there begins a sudden U-turn in the themes and discourses, fitting the context of a spreading and generating of the spirit of nationalism. On the whole throughout the war period, as we have seen with the exhibitions already mentioned, the period of the Second world war did not feature. The exception to this is Kosta Nikolić's text published in 1994 *The Yugoslav Army in the Homeland in the civil war in Serbia of 1944*⁴², wherein with a "breakthrough" reading he begins to arrive at a new interpretation of the history of second world war in which the Yugoslav Army in the Homeland is characterized as a nationally oriented anti-fascist movement⁴³. The most contested issue of the memorialization of the 'difficult heritage' in official Yugoslav politics of remembrance were the war maneuvers of the Yugoslav Army in the Fatherland (Jugoslovenska vojska u otadžbini) commonly known as the Chetnik movement (Četnički pokret) which started off as a nationalist anti-occupational movement at the very beginning of the war, but which, in the course of the war, became more exclusively an anti-communist – irredentist – movement led by ideas of re-establishing the monarchy as well as creating a "Greater Serbia", and one which was to collaborate with the occupying forces on numerous occasions. For the first time in 1993 in Serbian school textbooks the Chetnik movement was presented as the second resistance movement.

At the beginning of the Nineties, in a similar way, the abrupt change of museum politics was noticeable in the case of CHM. Before the dissolution of Yugoslavia, the Museum of the Revolution of Croatia was being prepared for a name-change to the Museum of Contemporary History of Croatia, which meant coming up with a new conception of the museum⁴⁴. The new permanent exhibition, which «thanks to historical distance and the new social climate should lead to a revalorization of historical events and personalities»⁴⁵, was never realized, and the CHM was duly formed. The radical thematic diversion of the CHM in the years of military conflict,

⁴¹ This claim can be illustrated through the examples of the titles of the texts which were published in the journals from 1987: *Josip Broz Tito and the creation of the party of the revolution, The Museum of the Revolution as a specific and characteristic type of museum, The presentation of the exhibition of the State history museum of Moscow: historical sites from the Great October in holograms*. The following texts were published in 1989: *The philosophical and socio-political ideas of Vaso Pelagić in his unpublished manuscripts, Additions to the biography of Živojin Žujović, The partial correspondence of Sima Marković, Filip Filipović and the representative bodies*, etc.

⁴² K. Nikolić, *Jugoslovenska vojska u otadžbini u srpskom građanskom ratu 1944*, in «Zbornik Istorijskog Muzeja Srbije», n. 28, 1994, pp. 165-187.

⁴³ See D. Stojanović, *Udžbenici istorije kao ogledalo vremena*, in *Ratništvo, patriotizam, patrijarhalnost*, eds. V. Pešić, R. Rosandić, Centar za antiratnu akciju, Beograd 1994, pp. 77-105.

⁴⁴ J. Vinterhalter, *Novi muzejski postavi*, in «Informativa museologica», n. 1-2, 1989, pp. 5-7, here p. 5.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

when this institution was beginning to play a new social function, is most apparent if the museum's functioning is compared before and during the war.

Up to the mid Eighties exhibitions were mostly dedicated to the idea of revolution⁴⁶, while those created after that year are devoted to the issues of nation-building. The exhibition *Josip Jelačić – the Legend and Reality* was organized in 1989 and lasted during the Nineties⁴⁷. In the same year (1990), the monument to noted army general and ban Jelačić (1848-1859) was returned to Zagreb's main square (it had been removed in 1947), as a symbol of «Croatian patriotism and resistance to any form of suppression of Croatian identity and independence»⁴⁸. Immediately after the exhibition about Jelačić, another about Ivan Mažuranić⁴⁹ *Ivan Mažuranić – the Ban pučanin [Ban commoner]* opened so that symbolically the story about Jelačić's very close collaborator might be continued. As is pointed out in the exhibition catalogue, Mažuranić was a great influence and it was he who «actually created many of Jelačić's legal decrees, a great many of the ideas conceived in the time of Jelačić's banship, and [...] he creatively contributed to later political conditions»⁵⁰.

Right before the start of the war in Croatia, under the patronage of the then president of Croatia Franjo Tuđman, in 1991 the CHM opened the exhibition *Stjepan Radić*. As a founder of the Croatian People's Peasant Party⁵¹, Radić could be considered as one of the key historical figures in the process of nation-building among Croats. He was the first politician to give the peasantry a political voice and one of those who strongly opposed unitary Yugoslavism within the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes. His assassination in the parliament by the member of the Radical Party (1928) became a symbol of the Croatian struggle for independence.

In the introductory text of the exhibition catalogue it is stressed that for the first time visitors had the opportunity to see objects from Radić's political and private life, but it also makes it known that «the democratic changes in the most recent Croatian history, whose foundations were already alluded to in the ideas and works of Stjepan Radić, will probably be influential on the great interest of visitors for this exhibition»⁵². At the exhibition is shown the hearse in which the body of the

⁴⁶ Up to 1990 exhibitions bore the titles: *The contribution of the Croatian emigrants to NOB* (1985), *The Woman of Croatia in the Revolution* (1985), *The Croatian people's rebirth 1790-1848* (1986), *Sports medals and distinctions from the Universiade* (1987), *The Croatian country and the French Revolution* (1989), etc.

⁴⁷ The publications of the Croatian History Museum can be followed on the official website of the museum; <http://www.hismus.hr/hr/izdavastvo/katalozi-izlozbi/?page=3> [accessed 14 June 2024].

⁴⁸ J. Hotko, *Radna bilježnica: Uspomene na jednog bana, in Ostavština Jelačić u Hrvatskom Povijesnom Muzeju*. Pedagogical guide to the exhibition, Hrvatski Povijesni Muzej, Zagreb 2010, p. 17.

⁴⁹ Ivan Mažuranić was poet, translator, and Croatian ban from 1873 to 1880.

⁵⁰ See *Ivan Mažuranić Ban Pučanin*, ed. J. Tomičić, Povijesni Muzej Hrvatske, Zagreb 1990.

⁵¹ Stjepan Radić and his brother Anton founded the Croatian People's Peasant Party in 1904. Its basic mission was the realization of Croatian statehood. Within the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, the party advocated that the Republic of Croatia should be based on self-determination. After the assassination of Radić, the leadership of the party was taken over by Vlatko Maček. Furthermore, the political leaders and the party itself were beset by constant struggle for survival under different historical circumstances. Nevertheless, through constant renewal and redefinition of political goals, the party, in a significantly reduced capacity, has survived until today.

⁵² *Stjepan Radić*, ed. J. Tomičić, Povijesni Muzej Hrvatske, Zagreb 1991, p. 13.

murdered politician was taken to its final resting place and which was followed by a funeral wake of thousands of Croatian citizens⁵³.

An exhibit, charged with patriotic feeling, was the painting «which shows Radić at a village party encircled by tamburitza playing musicians dressed in the national costume, alone in his hands Radić holds a pamphlet on which only one word is emphasized and visible – home»⁵⁴. This painting represents Radić as a patriot who enjoys the company of ordinary people and who respects their views. As a political figure, he is described in the respective catalogue as «no other politician of that time»⁵⁵; further it is stated that «Radić, through the everyday contacts with the peasants, has developed a pervasive sense of understanding ordinary peoples and was the only one who articulated the demands of these people in the Parliament»⁵⁶.

An exhibition of Croatian political posters from 1940-1950 was also held in 1991. It aimed to show, side by side, posters that propagandized Tito and the Partisan resistance, and also posters that propagandized the Poglavnik⁵⁷ and the Ustasha's Independent State of Croatia⁵⁸. To exhibit Josip Broz Tito, the supreme commander of the Partisan resistance and lifelong president of socialist Yugoslavia, beside Ante Pavelić, the leader of the Ustasha movement and the head of the Independent State of Croatia, as Snježana Pavičić, the author of the aforementioned exhibition daringly did, was a highly provocative act in the context of the socio-political changes and consequent military conflict in which Croatian society found itself at that time.

As war broke out in Croatia, so the exhibitions of the CHM⁵⁹ became ever more oriented towards the theme of the «Homeland war»⁶⁰. Historian and museologist

⁵³ See Z. Radić, *Nigde mjesta za kočiju Stjepana Radića!?*, in *Večernji list*, 3 January 2002, <https://www.vecernji.hr/kultura/nigde-mjesta-za-kociju-stjepana-radica-707560> [accessed 18 June 2024].

⁵⁴ M. Bingula, *Uloga muzeja u konstruiranju društvenog sjećanja na devedesete godine u Hrvatskoj*, in «Etnološka istraživanja», n. 17, 2012, pp. 135-151, here p. 142.

⁵⁵ *Stjepan Radić*, ed. J. Tomičić, cit., p. 35.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ The title which was used on political posters relating to the leader of the Ustasha movement in the Independent State of Croatia, that is Ante Pavelić.

⁵⁸ M. Bingula, *Uloga muzeja u konstruiranju društvenog sjećanja na devedesete godine u Hrvatskoj*, in «Etnološka istraživanja», n. 17, 2012, cit., here p. 143.

⁵⁹ It has to be added that regardless the war-time situation, in the period 1991-1995 the Croatian History Museum also produced numerous other exhibitions: *The medal collection of Dr. Veljko Malinar* (1991), *The Old Zagreb Crafts* (1991), *Meeting of the worlds – Croatia and America* (1992), *Croatian artists to the help of the 124th Vukovar brigade* (1992), *People's movements in Croatia 1883-1903* (1993), *Symbols of government and honour in Croatia in the 19th century* (1993), *Crosses from the holdings of the Croatian History museum* (1994), *Ferdinand Quiquerez 1845-1893* (1995), *Coats of arms, heraldries and genealogies: the catalogue of the collection of coats of arms heraldries and genealogies* (1995).

⁶⁰ «Domovinski rat» (Homeland war) is the official name in the Republic of Croatia for the armed conflict that took place between Croatia and the Yugoslav People's Army (controlled by the Serbian government) from 1991 to 1995. Drawing on the concept of performativity, by which the act of naming is understood both a social and linguistic practice, the phrase «Domovinski rat» was coined to define a communicative framework and thereby govern the interpretation of conflict. In this constellation the armed conflict 1991-1995 is defined as a defensive

Jadranka Vinterhalter States that in the period 1991/1992, generally across Croatia but also abroad, there were 138 documented exhibitions about the war-time destruction and suffering, fine-art exhibitions on the subject of war and restoration, fundraising exhibitions and auctions⁶¹. In the CHM of those years material was directly collected from the field, that is from the war, and presented in the exhibition *Living with the war against the war*, whilst a special exhibition *How Croatia defended itself: handguns in the Homeland war* opened in 1994 and was dedicated to only presenting the weapons which were being used in the war⁶².

In the same year, the exhibition *Art of the Croatian anti-fascist movement* was organized in the CHM under the patronage of the president of the Republic of Croatia Franjo Tuđman. The preface which the President wrote for the exhibition catalogue has this foreword:

When one country in the midst of a bloody war bears witness through its culture as a sign of the highest moral and vital interests, then that says much more about that country than any other possible index. Regardless of the complex historical situation of Croatia, which in [the] Second world war had to simultaneously lead the anti-fascist struggle and the struggle for people's liberation and survival, the positive and negative forces from the two sides of the front sometimes painfully mixed together – regardless of the organization of the Congress of cultural workers in Topusko, on the one hand it didn't only legitimize the anti-fascist struggle but also it legitimized the struggle for national freedom as a part of the anti-fascist struggle⁶³.

With these words, the president of Croatia underlines the importance of culture, in this case museum exhibitions, in «the struggle for national freedom». According to him, this struggle is not only taking place on the military front, but simultaneously in cultural institutions. He himself, as an agitator of collective identity in the circumstances of war, demonstrates the mutual connection of these fronts through the aforementioned preface. It is particularly important to point out that this quote also reflects Tuđman's tendency to integrate the narrative of the anti-fascist struggle into the nationalist discourse of the Croatian struggle for independence. Although he insisted on the ideological reconciliation of the Croatian people, Tuđman attributed the merits for the restoration of Croatian statehood during the Second world

liberation war for the independence of the State. Its use in the region of the former Yugoslavia is limited only to the territory of the Republic of Croatia.

⁶¹ J. Vinterhalter, *INTERLIBER 1992. I 1993. GODINE*, in «Informatica museologica», n. 1-4, 1992, pp. 135-136, here p. 136.

⁶² M. Bingula, *Uloga muzeja u konstruiranju društvenog sjećanja na devedesete godine u Hrvatskoj*, in «Etnološka istraživanja», n. 17, 2012, cit., here, p. 144.

⁶³ The Congress of cultural workers in Topusko was held on 25-27 June 1944. It was a meeting of the intellectual and artistic élite of Croatia, which supported People's Liberation Struggle. The quote is extracted from the Preface (signed by Franjo Tuđman) of the exhibition catalogue *Umjetnost Hrvatskog Antifašističkog Otpora* (The art of the Croatian anti-fascist resistance). The author of the exhibition was Prof. Doleres Ivanuša. See J. Tomičić, *Umjetnost Hrvatskog Antifašističkog Otpora*, Hrvatski Povijesni Muzej, Zagreb 1994.

war to Zavnoh (State Anti-Fascist Council for the National Liberation of Croatia). In this sense, the establishment of Avnoj (Anti-Fascist Council for the People's Liberation of Yugoslavia) borders (1943) at the same time legitimized the right of the Croatian people to secede (1991).

The exhibitions of the history museums in Serbia and Croatia during the period of the Nineties do not represent a gap between two State systems (of values) but rather a pedestal from which Serbian and Croatian ethnocentric cultures of memory arose. During the war the HMS focused on themes drawn from the XIX century – the awakening of a Serbian identity and independence arising out of the liberation from the Ottoman empire. There were no exhibitions or such activities on the subject of the war which broke out in Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina in the war period – even though the museum had in those years been collecting the «weapons and uniforms of the members of all the sides of the conflict»⁶⁴ – for which reason travelling exhibitions were organized in, as it was then formulated, «the Serbian lands», outside Serbia. Alternatively, in the CHM the «Homeland war» was musealized as it was in progress. At the beginning of the Nineties the CHM concisely selects themes, very precisely locating their revalorization in the Croatia of that time: on the one hand through the symbols of historical personalities and events in the context of the centuries-long struggle for independence and on the other hand, through the representations of the victims who paid the price for gaining State independence. HMS and CHM's different approaches to the musealization of the war/s reveal different emerging memory cultures. Croatia assigned fundamental meaning to the «Homeland War» as the foundational event for the Croatian State sovereignty, while Serbia encouraged strengthening of an unison understanding of identity among Serbian communities in Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia, thus providing symbolic meaning to the formation of the para-States proclaimed by Croatian Serbs and Bosnian Serbs. As has been shown by the aforementioned examples of history museums in Serbia and Croatia, at the moment of the Yugoslav crisis, not only did they not serve as a «voice of reason», but moreover they even zealously participated in the intensification of ethnocentric politics and the creation of convincing master narratives of ethnocentric historical identity-formation.

(Co-)creators and transmitters of the hegemonic discourses in perpetual flux: a mission of «waiting for a permanent exhibition»

After a decade of political changes and the (never-ending) transition of the early 2000s, since 2010 it seems evident that the new ethno-nationalist discourses in the (post-)Yugoslav space are here to stay. The topics they choose, the narratives they

⁶⁴ On the website, in the section which relates to the history of the History Museum of Serbia there is the following information: «immediately on the cessation of the military conflict on the territory of the former Yugoslavia examples of the weapons and uniforms of all the sides of the conflict were found». See the official website of the Museum, <http://imus.org.rs/o-nama/> [accessed 14 June 2024].

decide to tell, the text their work produces – all form part of the normative educational efforts. Museums impose their authoritative position and appear as ‘credible sources’ for the wider populations, recipients of discourses⁶⁵; being institutions which are not only voluntarily visited but often visited as part of regular school life.

The normative self-understanding of the museums in fulfilling their missions constructs them as interactive participants in the discourse practices⁶⁶ or intervening active subjects⁶⁷, who produce hegemonic discourses, as understood in Gramscian terms⁶⁸. Constructing their mission represents the first step in delineating the frameworks of their ideological work. Even though previously present⁶⁹, on the current CHM website, there is no specifically formulated mission. The statement that comes closest to the mission is as follows: «[to] present significant phenomena and processes in Croatian history and culture from the early Middle Ages to modern times, with an emphasis on historical events of the XIX and XX century that influenced the creation of national identity and led to the integration of the Croatian nation»⁷⁰. Similarly, HMS declares as part of its mission the following: «In addition, through museum exhibitions it responsibly and competently articulates and interprets the knowledge of the past not only of Serbia and the Serbian people, but also of the other peoples and cultures that have lived and still live in the territory of Serbia from the Middle Ages to the present»⁷¹.

«Responsibly and competently articulating and interpreting the knowledge of the past» reconfirms the expert position of the museum in the production of historical knowledge. Interestingly, the text continues to analyze the mission of the museum from 1966 underlining that it referred exclusively to the Serbian people; this has now been changed. While it seems a prominent change, the text on the whole website remains written exclusively in Serbian language in Cyrillic and English, without translation to Hungarian or Albanian languages, languages of the two biggest ethnic minorities in Serbia. The text elaborates its critique towards the socialist Yugoslav past of the museum:

⁶⁵ M.S. Nesler et al., *The effect of credibility on perceived power*, in «Journal of Applied Social Psychology», n. 23, 1993, pp. 1407-1425.

⁶⁶ G. Kress, T. van Leeuwen, *Reading Images*, cit., p. 48.

⁶⁷ R. Wodak, M. Meyer, *Methods of Critical Discourse Analysis*, Sage Publications, London 2001, p. 36.

⁶⁸ A. Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci*, International Publishers, New York 1971.

⁶⁹ Authors' notes from 2014 of the museum's website note that the Croatian History Museum States as its main mission to «preserve and communicate the national historical heritage [...] documenting and interpreting the history of the Croatian people and the people who live in Croatia [...] from the early Middle Ages to the modern day». The text further stated that «by means of interdisciplinary, complementary research into authentic museum materials, the Croatian History Museum gathers information and engenders knowledge on Croatia's past for the purpose of trustworthy articulation and comprehensive museological presentation of Croatian history». The declarative statement on trustworthiness and comprehension of their narrative uncovered the regime of truth as the key museum's mission. The museum has since evolved, as is further elaborated in this article.

⁷⁰ Croatian History Museum, *Towards the first permanent exhibition of the Croatian History Museum*, <https://www.hismus.hr/en/permanent-display/content-will-be-available-soon/> [accessed 14 June 2024].

⁷¹ Historical Museum of Serbia, *About us*, <https://imus.org.rs/en/about-us/> [accessed 14 June 2024].

In this connection, the political, cultural and historical mainstreams had a huge impact: middle-class culture was discarded, squeezed out and degraded, and the cultural achievements of the distant Middle Ages (particularly of the valuable mediaeval architectural and painting heritage in Serbia) emphasized, together with the most recent war⁷² and post-war periods of socialist reconstruction, which coincided with the direction of scientific research in the humanities (history, art history, ethnology, archaeology), the results of which are crucial for much of museology⁷³.

Without any clear nomination of who is being criticized – «the political, cultural and historical mainstreams» or the socialist Yugoslav regime – the text underlines the usual anticommunist and anti-Yugoslav trope of the dismantling of middle-class culture, regardless of the upward social mobility in socialist times; avoiding direct denominations, and remaining ideological through the implicit messages.

In contrast to the two examples of national historical museums, MY has adapted its formulation of the mission in a more self-reflective position, acknowledging the processes of common knowledge production between the institution and the visitors and other actors, and embracing the interactive role of discourse producers:

[The] Museum of Yugoslavia is an open institution that encourages different actors to actively perceive the present by modern interpretation of the past. Our mission is to be the place of open dialogue, to exchange knowledge and experiences on the social and cultural phenomena of the 20th century with all institutions, organizations and individuals interested in issues on Yugoslav heritage and Yugoslav past. Through our programs and activities, we encourage social memory and culture of remembrance related to development of the Yugoslav idea, since the creation of the Yugoslav State as a kingdom, until its breakup in the early 1990s. By the innovative approach to unique collections and preserved testimonies of Yugoslavia we offer authentic insights, knowledge and experiences through exhibition, education and interactive programs to our visitors⁷⁴.

In its mission, MY underlines innovative approaches, openness of the institutions, modern interpretations, open dialogue, exchange of knowledge and experiences – claiming its hegemonic institutional position, yet through a different approach by distancing from a monolithic understanding of history and truth regimes – a transnational approach.

Regardless of their diverse missions, what is shared across all three museums is that there is no permanent exhibition. HMS has an exhibition since 2021 in one of its buildings – the residence of Prince Miloš in Topčider – focusing exclusively on Serbia from 1804 to 1903, thus it is not understood as a comprehensive permanent

⁷² The text here refers to second world war.

⁷³ Historical Museum of Serbia, *About us*, <https://imus.org.rs/en/about-us/> [accessed 14 June 2024].

⁷⁴ Museum of Yugoslavia, *About the museum*, <https://muzej-jugoslavije.org/en/o-nama/> [accessed 14 June 2024].

display⁷⁵. HMS's current exhibition, since 20 April 2023, under the title *Waiting for the permanent exhibition*, presents objects that belonged to Karađorđević and Obrenović dynasties, as well as medieval dynasties' reconstructed crowns, fully disregarding contemporary history or any Yugoslav socialist past⁷⁶. In 2017/2018 CHM set an exhibition under the title *Unreachable heritage – secrets of the Croatian History Museum's depots*, advocating for the move of the museum to a more appropriate premises and a permanent exhibition. Its approach differed from that of its counterpart in Serbia in that 216 exhibited items covered the wider range of the history of Croatia, including the contemporary period like a display of «the badge for Jews», or «sketch of the Goli otok prison camp»⁷⁷. Not only did CHM not move nor produce a permanent exhibition, it also has been closed to the public since 2020.

MY has had numerous attempts at a permanent exhibition. In 2009, a project called *New Old Museum*, which according to the then-website was initiated out of the need for «a critical rethinking of a common past and for awareness raising about the positive and the negative common heritage»⁷⁸. In 2012, the exhibition *Yugoslavia: from the beginning to the end*, gathered numerous experts and historians from the (post-)Yugoslav space. Despite the claims of multiperspectivity and objectivity in the catalogue, the exhibition showed a salience of negative phenomena and absence of seminal ones, like the Second world war, grouping the catalogue, and thus the exhibition, around four underlying themes: «[the] impossibility of a Yugoslav project; the continuous hatred and discord between different ethnic communities; the backwardness in the democratic development through depicting the authoritarian tendencies and emphasizing the criminal aspect of socialist Yugoslavia [...] and underlining the lack of (profound) modernization success in socialist Yugoslavia»⁷⁹.

In 2015, the museum radically changed its approach to the conceptualization of a permanent exhibition, deciding to open the dialogic space to interventions from external curators, artists and other public personalities, using their collections as a starting point for the debate, through the platform *We are opening the Depot*: juxtaposing Tito's memorabilia (gifts and personal objects) and the socialist revolution, with the most recent period from 1996 to the present as a third segment. This platform transformed into the *Museum Laboratory* (2017-2025), continuously including various external associates, and visitors, as well as through Project Yugoslavia, 100 short video interviews of museum associates, each inspired by one artifact.

⁷⁵ Historical Museum of Serbia, *Serbia 1804-1913 – the permanent exhibition at the residence of Prince Miloš*, <https://imus.org.rs/en/exhibitions/serbia-1804-1903-the-permanent-exhibition-at-the-residence-of-prince-milos/> [accessed 14 June 2024].

⁷⁶ Historical Museum of Serbia, *Waiting for the permanent exhibition*, <https://imus.org.rs/en/exhibitions/waiting-for-the-permanent-exhibition/> [accessed 14 June 2024].

⁷⁷ Croatian History Museum, *Exhibitions, past exhibitions, unreachable heritage*, <https://www.hismus.hr/en/exhibitions/past-exhibitions/unreachable-heritage-secrets-croatian-history-museums-depots/> [accessed 14 June 2024].

⁷⁸ Author's notes from 2016.

⁷⁹ M. Popović, *Exhibiting Yugoslavia*, in «Družboslovne Razprave», n. 81, 2016, cit., here pp. 22-23.

The *Museum Laboratory* declared its aim as to «re-examine the Yugoslav heritage and the very institution of the Museum»⁸⁰. The exhibition lets the visitor «wander through [...] and discover stories behind the exhibits» or to «choose one of the routes», with routes being sign museum (events related to people with disabilities), workers and factories (on industrial heritage), and the end of the Second world war⁸¹. Adopting a dialogic approach, MY remained loyal to its mission of creating a counter-memory institution, leaving space for dissonant narratives on the socialist Yugoslav past, yet without openly defying the hegemonic anti-Yugoslav discourses of the political élites and the State(s).

The hegemony of the ephemeral – choosing the topics, telling the story

The selection of exhibition topics by the national history museums proves crucial for transferring knowledge «on which the collective and individual consciousness feeds»⁸². While there is not sufficient space in this article to go into details or to offer a full comprehensive analysis of all exhibitions, we focus on the categorization of exhibitions organized since 2010 (see Tables 2 and 3), looking into the temporal choices of CHM and HMS, and into topical choices of MY, including only those exhibitions curated and organized by the museums in question. What emanates clearly from this overview is the overwhelming focus of HMS on the XIX and early XX centuries, and for CHM on the most recent past – since the dissolution of the socialist Yugoslavia and the Yugoslav wars, up to the very present moment. For HMS, the present moment is relevant only when referring to the NATO bombing of Serbia⁸³. On the website of CHM, specific virtual exhibitions can be found only in the Croatian version and not in an English one, without seemingly established criteria for the translation of some and not others⁸⁴.

⁸⁰ Museum of Yugoslavia, *Exhibitions and programs, list of exhibitions, museum laboratory*, <https://muzej-jugoslavije.org/en/exhibition/laboratorija-muzeja-jugoslavije/> [accessed 14 June 2024].

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² R. Wodak, M. Meyer, *Methods of Critical Discourse Analysis*, cit., p. 38.

⁸³ NATO bombing of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia lasted from 24 March to 10 June 1999, ending in the Kumanovo agreement and de facto independence of Kosovo. The bombing was preceded by a long conflict between the Kosovo Albanian ethnic community and the Republic of Serbia State forces.

⁸⁴ Only the virtual exhibitions that can be found on the English version of the website are here included in the analysis.

Table 2: Temporal clustering of exhibitions

Institution	Medieval times	XIX century/ early XX century	First world war	Monarchist Yugoslavia	Second world war	Socialist Yugoslavia	Present
Historical Museum of Serbia	<i>Saint Save of Serbia</i> (2016); <i>Kings and saints of Serbia</i> (2020)	<i>Here am I, here are you...the recollections of Prince Miloš</i> (2015); <i>Pupin – from physical to spiritual reality</i> (2015/2016); <i>Punk visual art portraits of the Obrenović dynasty</i> (2016); <i>Karađorđe's murder</i> (2017/2018); <i>Đorđe Stanojević – the man who lit up Serbia</i> (2018); <i>The return of the general – 145th anniversary of the arrival of Russian volunteers in Serbia</i> (2021)	<i>Serbia in 1915-1916 and the French-Serbian hospital in Sedes, Thessaloniki</i> (2016/2017); <i>The end of the Great War 1917-1918</i> (2018/2019)		<i>In the name of the people</i> (2014); <i>The holy new martyrs of Jasenovac in the light of resurrection</i> (2021)	<i>Before or after or now</i> (2016); <i>Princess Elizabeth – a long journey home</i> (2019);	<i>The legacy of Olga Olja Ivanjicki</i> (2017); <i>Serbia 19 years after 1999 – while the bombs were dropping</i> (2018)

**Croatian
History
Museum**

<p><i>Varvaria/ Breberium/ Bribir: historical layer revealed (2019); Sword – a long time ago (2021)</i></p>	<p><i>Ivan Kukuljević Sakcinski – the initiator of Croatian identity (2016); Ivana Brlić Mažuranić (2024)</i></p>	<p><i>Images of the Great War (2015)</i></p>	<p><i>1918 – a turning point for Croatia (2018/2019)</i></p>	<p><i>Who's shootin' over there? (2017); '45 (2017/2018); If I forget you... – the Holocaust in Croatia 1941- 1945 (2020)</i></p>	<p><i>Seventy-first (2021/2022)</i></p>	<p><i>Faces of war (2015); Dubrovnik during the Homeland war 1991-1995 (2017); Indescribable!!! (2018); Croatian warriors – Ukraine (2019); Zagreb spring 2020 (2020); Flashback '91 (2021); Ten summers in Europe – Croatian membership in the European union (2023)</i></p>
---	---	--	--	---	---	---

As in Belgrade MY heralds the role of presenting the Yugoslav past, HMS has had only two displays referring to the period of the socialist Yugoslavia: *In the name of the people! Political repression in Serbia 1944-53* and an exhibition organized in cooperation with the Serbian Orthodox Church, focused on Serbian victims of the Jasenovac camp. *In the name of the people*, authored by historian Srđan Cvetković, is an exhibition that received loud reactions from researchers, curators and the public in general, and yet has somehow disappeared from the website of the Historical Museum of Serbia. The visual solution of the exhibition represented Serbia as a camp, closed off by barbed wire, further equalizing Nazism and communism through putting swastikas next to the red stars in the display. Historians claimed a serious number of inconsistencies, and false data were presented: photographs from Buchenwald concentration camp were represented as the photographs of Goli otok⁸⁵. The opening of the exhibition was welcomed by the right wing nationalist political groups, as well as libertarian groups⁸⁶ – united in their anticommunist stands, reiterating the harmony between the discourse of the exhibition and museum and the hegemonic State neo-nationalist narratives and attempts of «confiscation of memory»⁸⁷. The choice of the topics, as well as their overall discursive framing, confirms HMS as a loyal actor of the State hegemonic discourses.

The Second world war and the socialist Yugoslav times in CHM were presented by an exhibition of photographs from the Second world war; an exhibition focusing on the end of the war in 1945; and most recently, on the Holocaust in Croatia and the political tumults in the Seventies – the Croatian spring⁸⁸. The exhibition under the name '45 depicts the end of the Second world war and in parallel introduces the new regime – the socialist Yugoslav one, the text naming the year as «still debated, variously interpreted and evaluated, not only in Croatia, but also far beyond»⁸⁹. Embracing the ambivalence of interpretations, including the museum's own, the text calls upon the impossibility of any «objective distance [from] the intense political events and ruptures that let loose an avalanche of tensions between society and the individual»⁹⁰. Placing Croatia as the victor and the defeated, the text explains that «that year [...] contained several legitimately repressive political systems, fascist and communist, as well as the continued persistence of monarchist aspirations»⁹¹. Such evaluative statements, understood in terms of Fairclough⁹², equating fascism and communism while calling for ambiguity and impossibility of «a balance be-

⁸⁵ M. Radanović, *Kuća terora u Muzeju revolucije*, in *Peščanik*, 2 June 2014, <https://pescanik.net/kuca-terora-u-muzeju-revolucije/> [accessed 14 June 2024].

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ S. Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia*, Basic Books, New York 2001, p. 61.

⁸⁸ Croatian spring, or Hrvatsko proljeće, or Maspok, was a political conflict that took place in 1967-1971 in the Socialist Republic of Croatia. See further H. Klasić, *Hrvatsko proljeće u Sisku*, Srednja Europa, Zagreb 2006.

⁸⁹ Croatian History Museum, *Exhibitions, past exhibitions, '45*, https://www.hismus.hr/en/exhibitions/past-exhibitions/45_eng/ [accessed 14 June 2024].

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² N. Fairclough, *Critical Discourse Analysis*, cit.

tween the various political sides or to seek some unattainable balance»⁹³ nor «absolute truth, but also not to minimize the military victory over fascism»⁹⁴, nevertheless establish an ideological positionality of the discourse. It is important to note the continuous use of discursive strategies of depersonalization – there is an absolute lack of identification of agents and the affected, remaining unclear whose aspirations were monarchist, who brought the communist ideology and conducted the repression, as well as who was racist, and towards whom. However, in the case of CHM it is noticeable that the period of socialist Yugoslavia appears only recently among the exhibitions' topics, showing us developments in the hegemonic discursive unity of the museum and possibilities of more heterogeneous memory politics.

Both national museums in Croatia and Serbia, as sites where definitions of culture and identity are articulated and asserted⁹⁵, aligned with «organized forgetting»⁹⁶ of the (socialist) Yugoslav period; MY – leaving behind its name 'history' – remained the only public museum dealing explicitly with the Yugoslav heritage. MY deals primarily with the period of socialist Yugoslavia, despite its reformulated mission: there were only two exhibitions on the monarchist Yugoslavia, only one specifically on the Second world war, and two on the more recent years. Looking into the thematic distribution of the exhibitions held at the museum since 2010 (see Table 3), the figure of Josip Broz Tito is most eminent. This naturally stems from the museum's collections; given it has been primarily the memorial center of the Yugoslav president. Certainly, some exhibitions had transversal themes; for example, *Tito in Africa – picturing solidarity* has not only focused on the personality (cult) of Tito, but also on the political connections between socialist Yugoslavia and the postcolonial regimes of the African continent, through the lens of the Non-Aligned Movement.

Table 3: Thematic clustering of exhibitions in the Museum of Yugoslavia

Topic	Exhibitions
Monarchist Yugoslavia	<i>The day worth a century – I XII 1918</i> (2018/2019); <i>To be a Falcon is to be a Yugoslav</i> (2016)
Childhood and youth	<i>Hedgehog's home – inventing a better world</i> (2023/2024); <i>Fiery greetings – a representative portrayal of childhood in socialist Yugoslavia</i> (2015); <i>History – second hand future</i> (2013/2014); <i>Growing up in Kraljevo</i> (2013/2014); <i>The last young Yugoslavs</i> (2011/2012)

⁹³ Croatian History Museum, *Exhibitions, past exhibitions*, '45, https://www.hismus.hr/en/exhibitions/past-exhibitions/45_eng/ [accessed 14 June 2024].

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ *Museums and Communities: The Politics of Public Culture*, eds. I. Karp, C.M. Kreamer, S. Lavine, Smithsonian Institution Press, Washington 1992.

⁹⁶ P. Connerton, *How Societies Remember*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1989, p. 14.

Sport	<i>100 years of Radnički</i> (2020/2021); <i>Moments to remember: Olympism in Serbia 1912–2012</i> (2012)
Second world war	<i>TANJUG is reporting – the war is over</i> (2020); <i>The free city of Belgrade</i> (2014)
Industrialization	<i>On factories and workers</i> (2021/2022); <i>Guardians of Time – forgotten industrial heritage</i> (2017)
Tito	<i>Comrade Tito has died</i> (2021/2025); <i>Figures of memory</i> (2015/2021); <i>Ancient Greece in the Museum of Yugoslavia</i> (2018); <i>Tito in Africa – picturing solidarity</i> (2017); <i>History is made of different shades of grey</i> (2016/2017); <i>The grand illusion – Tito and 24 million meters of celluloid</i> (2014); <i>Creating the myth of Tito</i> (2014); <i>Royal gifts</i> (2013); <i>Comrade President's collection of paintings</i> (2012)
Non-Aligned Movement	<i>Prometheans of the New Century</i> (2021); <i>Traveling Communiqué</i> (2014); <i>Non-Aligned from Belgrade to Belgrade</i> (2011)
Migrations	<i>The Nineties: a glossary of migrations</i> (2019/2020); <i>Yuga, my Yuga – Gastarbeiter stories</i> (2016/2017)
Political turmoil	<i>Frames of 1968</i> (2018)
Architecture	<i>Re/cognition</i> (2016/2017)
Nineties	<i>Lessons from '91</i> (2017)
Monuments	<i>On Revolution Roads – memorial tourism in Yugoslavia</i> (2016)
Design and fashion	<i>Design for a new world</i> (2015/2016); <i>Design center</i> (2013); <i>Hidden design</i> (2013); <i>The porcelain gleam of socialism</i> (2013); <i>Iskra</i> (2013); <i>Drugarica à la mode</i> (2011)
Art exhibitions	<i>Recorded memories</i> (2015); <i>Art as resistance to fascism</i> (2015); <i>NEO N.O.B.</i> (2013/2014)
Everyday life	<i>They never had it better?</i> (2014/2015); <i>Technology to the people</i> (2012)

It is noticeable that throughout the years the museum stepped away from more “neutral” themes of design and fashion or art exhibitions, towards more political themes of migrations, or the Non-Aligned Movement itself. The (only) exhibition on the political plurality in the socialist times, more specifically the year 1968 and

the student protests of the time has been, symbolically enough, exhibited in another space – an alternative cultural center, Center for Cultural Decontamination (Czkd). However, despite a sometimes cautious approach to the controversial narratives of the socialist times, the Museum of Yugoslavia demonstrates not only the most progressive approach in terms of curatorial and design solutions, moving beyond objects of power and rulers' insignia which are abundant in the national historical museums, but also the tremendous development in the last decade towards embracing the dialogic position of the institution. Through its accompanying programs of debates, guided tours, conferences, and other events, as well as interactivity of the exhibitions, MY declares autonomy as an agent of discursive production of the past making more visible «differing discourses and ideologies contending and struggling for dominance»⁹⁷.

Conclusions

While museum narratives feed from and feed into hegemonic narratives, given the hegemonic institutional positionality of museums, exhibitions represent discursive events which uncover the ideological text of the museums. As ideologies are best identified in the unsaid, the implicit, the significant absences of the socialist Yugoslav history from the national history museums in Croatia and Serbia depicts the framework of the ethno-nationalist contemporary politics.

In times of profound political changes, as well as military conflicts, the conjunction between the nation as an «imagined community»⁹⁸ and the role of the history museums as a place of production of collective memory takes center-stage through every aspect of the museum's operations. In the early Nineties, during the wars and the final dissolution of the socialist Yugoslav State, ethno-national discourses became the backbone of the history museums' production, interpretation and reinterpretation of history. Despite the integration of the collections of the museums of revolution into the newly (re-)established history museums, the hegemonic discourses of the political elites required the elimination of the socialist Yugoslav history from the displays, leaving it forgotten (HMS and CHM) or turned into a meta-exhibit (MY).

Today, the conditions of all three institutions differ drastically. As CHM is closed to the public, HMS is still waiting for a larger exhibition space and MY has just finished its comprehensive renovation works. The history museums have not been prioritized in the cultural policies of Croatia and Serbia, and these obstacles, along with the heterogeneity of memory politics, have resulted in the lack of any single one permanent exhibition to date. The heterogeneity of memory politics reflects in the multiplicity of curatorial approaches, and not only between them, but also with-

⁹⁷ R. Wodak, M. Meyer, *Methods of Critical Discourse Analysis*, cit., p. 10.

⁹⁸ For the understanding of the notion «imagined community» see B. Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, Verso Books, London 2016.

in them – through more attentive analysis, we can conclude the influence certain curators have added or deducted from the exhibitions' production. In recent years, CHM has noticeably diversified its approaches to the discursive depiction of the history of Croatia, as well as modernized the representations on its website and in the exhibitions. HMS remains the most ethno-nationally embedded, both in terms of topical selection and the (re-)creation of the national myths, as well as in the most conservative museological and curatorial approaches.

MY has found itself in a particular location: being the only museum dealing with the Yugoslav past, thus allowed to introduce and reflect on the socialist period, yet having lost the title of 'history' from its name. Becoming the Museum of Yugoslavia, not necessarily dealing with history, has meant freeing up the museum from the social role of presentation and interpretation of Yugoslav history, but it also leaves open the question of whether it remains a museum or another hybrid type of institution. Possibly, this reconceptualization of its typology is exactly what provided it the possibility to introduce counter-memory narratives and dissident views on the ethno-national mythologizations, while still remaining within the State-approved frameworks. As the topical choices of the exhibitions expanded, and the website itself became the most interactive and progressive, the very curatorial approaches within MY have put it on the map of the most progressive museological institutions in the (post-)Yugoslav space.