

## **“Mine, Yours, Ours, No One's”: The Story of the National Museum of Bosnia-Herzegovina**

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“That’s the point of the whole story. No one holds anything against the National Museum. The Museum is simply irrelevant to everyone. Irrelevant. But people constantly contend on its account. So then, everything happens on its account, everyone loves it, but won’t deal with it, none of the politicians will ever say it should be shut down. Everyone will say that it’s great, important, significant...” (Mirsad Sijarić, 2019).

The function of national and/or historical museums to provide scenography and stage for the performance of myths of nationhood is an important part within the process of constructing collective memory of a nation. In other words, museums participate or support the discourse that creates a collective memory for the conformation and consolidation of nations (Pennebaker and Banasik, 1997; Anderson, 1983; Knell, 2011; Bigand, 2017). Furthermore, they also fit within the argument that “for societies to exist at all, the societal members must share a very high percentage of their experiences to increase the cohesiveness of their memories”, as they are the institutions that dictate and exhibit those shared experiences with a goal to ‘glue’ memories together and nourish the imagination of the community (Pennebaker and Banasik, 1997, pp. 4–6). Museums are places where individuals are guided to self-recognize in such works and artefacts and imagine themselves as a part of a bigger social group (Pardo Rodriguez, 2014).

But what happens when the museums that are supposed to function as ‘national museums’ are not trusted and are consequently not recognized socio-cultural actors in the society because of the unresolved past, which has long after the war has ended still been dividing the groups previously involved in armed conflict? And what happens, when only one ethnic (majoritarian) group, which is in absolute numbers bigger than the second and the third group together, has potentially positive perceptions of a national museum, because it fits its ideational imaginary of the nation or state, whereas other two groups - which occasionally even contest the statehood of an internationally recognized country - either do not see the museum as important part of identity and heritage and, consequently, even build its own museum?

The general objective of this chapter is to illustrate how national museums, which are considered as vital socio-cultural actors in above defined functions, can be contested, neglected and/or distrusted just because of what they are meant to be: to have ‘all-national’, state- and unifying character, important for all peoples living in a state. One of many empirical realities of this can be found in Bosnia and Herzegovina (hereinafter BiH), a post-conflict state far away from a reconciled society, where ethno-political interpretations of reality 25 years after the end of the war continue to divide its peoples. The preliminary insight into BiH’s cultural and heritage places has shown that the status of the National Museum of Bosnia and Herzegovina (*Zemaljski muzej*) – the museum, which was meant to function as a state museum – has until nowadays *de facto* not been legally resolved, which was eagerly exploited by nationalist politicians (Autonomija, 2013; Oslobođenje, 2018). In this chapter, we will focus on the case of National Museum of BiH to explore, how contentious cultural heritage can be in post-conflict societies and of how the politics of ‘ethno-political’ exclusivism persists also in the cultural-educational spaces, which are aimed to go beyond ethno-political. The National Museum, which was closed for three years (2012–2015) due to financial problems that derived from the unresolved status fuelled by a dispute among the politicians of major (ethno-)political parties in BiH, is a vivid example, how a state-level cultural institution can be neglected and side-lined, when politicians see the museum just as an another venue of their particularistic political struggles.

As seen from the academic literature in the field of cultural and memory studies, museums function as important *national* socio-cultural actors. However, the role of its very museum seems to be somewhat challenged in BiH. Hence, the following main research question drove the research: how is the National Museum of Bosnia and Herzegovina understood – in people’s minds – in the context of post-conflict BiH’s society that is predominantly driven by ethno-political exclusivism? By utilising the interviews that were conducted in the period between 12–25 November 2018 with 21 respondents from both Federation of BiH and Republika Srpska and the analysis of secondary sources – predominantly newspaper reports citing the politicians’ statements regarding the museum –, we will try to illustrate the paradox of all-national, state museums in the post-conflict society of BiH.

The chapter is divided as follows. The first section examines the role of museums in post-conflict societies within memory studies. The second section is devoted to the social and historical contours of the National Museum of BiH. The third section explains the museum’s ‘contesting character’, by putting it within the context of another museum in BiH – the

Museum of Republika Srpska, which now serves predominantly to foster the Bosnian Serb narratives and so symbolizes the paradoxical role of heritage in BiH, based on ethno-political exclusivism. The fourth section introduces the empirical findings on the National Museum and its 'national' role in contemporary BiH's society, gathered by interviews conducted in both political entities of BiH: Bosniak-dominated Federation BiH and Bosnian Serb-dominated Republika Srpska.. The interviews are combined with the evidence on the role and positions of the dominant political actors on the National Museum in the period 2012–2015, when the museum was closed. The conclusion untangles the theoretical implications and suggests possibilities for future research.

### **Role of heritage and museums in post-conflict societies**

Current scholarship in memory studies acknowledge that museums; a) communicate the past; b) are a useful tool for governing and exercising new forms of power; c) are place where the instrumentalization of cultural elements, objects and 'heroic' past is occurred in order to evoke and conform national feelings (Nielsen, 2014; Calligaro, 2014; Gray, 2008; Black, 2011; de Simone, 2013; Bozoglu, 2019). Thus, museums have several functions, one of them being the institutions for the preservation and presentation of heritage and history (Lozić, 2015, p. 310). As argued by Phillips (2010, p. 397), museums are understood as spaces for the representation of the past in the present, in which the focal point is to transcend time-space boundaries and contribute to both imagination and realization national ambitions through a selection of material culture such as key artefacts and works (Rosenzweig and Thelen, 1998; Bigand, 2017, p. 40). These artefacts and works, which are understood as 'the legacy of the past', fall into the categorization of heritage as they are selectively used for contemporary purposes due to their potential to function as aggregation of myths, values and inheritances (Tunbridge and Ashworth, 1996; Ashworth and Graham, 2005; Graham and Howard, 2008). From this perspective, i.e. that artefacts and works are determined and defined by the needs of societies in the present, the heritage process, which Hyun Kyung Lee (2019) defines as 'heritagisation' (p. 24), goes hand-in-hand with the process of forming national identity<sup>1</sup> and collective memory<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> National identity, which encompasses both the modernist and primordialist approach, can be understood as "a sense of sameness over time and space" (Gillis, 1994, p. 3) and a "sense of unity with others belonging to the same nation" (Bell, 2003, p. 69)

The afore-mentioned “heritagisation”, which unfolds within institutionalized socio-cultural settings such as museums, is dependent upon political, economic, and social concerns of the present (Graham and Howards, 2008, p. 2). This argument was further elaborated by Knell (2011) and Johansson (2015), who showed that museums modify their perspectives in accordance to social, cultural, economic and political context and the play of power in order to (re)produce the idea of common identities and differences, history, and geographic boundaries. Cultural heritage that is commonly possessed by museums evokes collective memory and develops as an ‘influential device in the construction of nation states’ as emphasized by Anico and Peralta (2009) and Youn (2014), and so present an important means of state-building (Zupančič and Prebilič, 2014). Furthermore, according to Whelan (2003) and McDowell (2008), heritage is constructed through a highly politicised process that is subject to contestation and bound up in construction, reconstruction and deconstruction of both memory and identity (p. 43). Subsequently, selected collective memory and heritage that is narrated within museums, are used not only to support claims about ‘golden ages and national achievements’, but also to support the present ideology and legitimacy claims (Graham et al., 2000, p. 55).

However, the past consists not only of ‘national golden age’, but also of painful and traumatic events. In that regard, the typology<sup>3</sup> on how states build their national museums, which was introduced by Peter Aronsson (2011, p. 47), positioned the countries of former Yugoslavia and Baltic states as emerging nation-states with “conscious and explicit nationalistic national narrative” without considering the post-conflict dimension. Deriving from this, scholars within memory and heritage studies field have recently generated a vast array of terms to describe the traumatic and painful heritage, which is present in post-conflict societies. These include ‘dissonant heritage’ (Tunbridge and Ashworth, 1996; Graham, 2002), ‘difficult heritage’ (Logan and Reeves, 2008; MacDonald, 2009), ‘heritage that hurts’ (Uzzell and Ballantyne, 1998), ‘negative heritage’ (Meskell, 2002), ‘contested heritage’ (Tunbridge et al.,

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<sup>2</sup> The idea of collective memory has been discussed in a vast body of literature (Huyssen, 1995; Winter, 1998). According to Halbwachs (1992) and Bell (2003), collective memory is defined as “a product of individuals (or groups of individuals), coming together to share memories of particular events, of time past”.

<sup>3</sup> Typology is based on three categories. First, former empires and conglomerate states, such as France and United Kingdom, often utilize universalistic approach and perceive themselves as multicultural societies. Second, smaller countries with a long history of nation-building (e.g. Sweden, Portugal) strive towards defining the nation as a long-lasting entity and display their scientific and aesthetic value in museum spaces. Third, in emerging nation-states, such as the Western Balkans and Baltic states, there is a clear pattern of representing the national narrative because of the short history of these states

1996; Shaw and Jones, 1997; Winter, 2007), and ‘dark heritage’ (Lennon and Foley, 2000; Carr, 2010).

Among these terms, we can differentiate between two groups, namely: a) those which focus on how a society collectively remembers and currently accepts the traumatic and painful past (Lennon and Foley, 2000; Meskell, 2002; Carr, 2010); b) those which pinpoint multiple views of how traumatic and painful pasts are interpreted in the present and look at controversial heritage processes (Kyung Lee, 2019, p. 28). Both ways are helpful when analysing the phenomena of contested and/or neglected cultural heritage in post-conflict society, but the term ‘contested heritage’, which is situated within the second group, for the purpose of our study somehow fits best. Furthermore, as Winter (2007) showed, the term ‘contested heritage’ inherently encompasses the “contesting nature between different groups seeking differing claims of identity from the past” (p. 13).

This is also the case with a national museum in post-conflict society of BiH, where the National Museum exists within broader competing forms of collective memories; the memories, which are subjected to the construction of a new memory, or rather three ‘constituent’ memories, based on mutually exclusive Bosniak, Bosnian Serb and Bosnian Croat narratives (Sokol, 2014, p. 107). In line with this, the National Museum became the ‘collateral damage’ of differing claims of identity from the past and failed to be recognized as socio-cultural actor within the process of constructing collective memory.

### **History of the National Museum of Bosnia and Herzegovina**

In BiH, majority of the population is split amongst the three constituent peoples, where Bosniaks take up around 50.1% of the overall population, Serbs approximately 30.8%, and Croats 15.4% (CIA). As it was previously discussed, historical existence of different nations in Bosnia-Herzegovina has always been a present issue. Historically speaking, the first peoples that had originally arrived in territory of today’s BiH in 6<sup>th</sup> century, were then known as South Slavs. Only after the Great Schism of 1054 and with the Ottoman rule in BiH, ethno-religious identities become more intertwined, establishing the historical path of today’s ethnic and religious identities in BiH. With influences coming from different sides – Roman, Byzantine and the Ottoman empires – different parts of BiH had taken various paths toward establishing ethnic traditions, values and histories.

The National Museum of Bosnia and Herzegovina is one of the most prominent cultural institutions in Western Balkans. With its history of over 130 years, collections inside the Museum are of impeccable importance, such as the Sarajevo Haggadah. On February 1, 1888, the intellectual elite of BiH had been gathered together, which marked the beginning of the Museum's remarkable path (Popić-Filipović, 2012, p. 185). At the time of the Museum's establishment, BiH had still been under the Austro-Hungarian rule. Its establishment was largely of political and economic nature. With relatively newly established rule in BiH with the Berlin Congress in 1878, the Habsburgs wanted to utilize the National Museum, then known as the Provincial Museum, to digress from former traditions of Serbian Kingdom, emphasizing the multiculturalism of Austro-Hungarian Empire (Fontana, 2013, p. 450). Moreover, known for their intensive involvement in different cultural, educational and development plans, the Habsburgs had had envisioned the Museum to be a great opportunity for their explorers and scientists, BiH still being an unexplored region (Museums of the World, 2019). Originally, the Provincial Museum was not located in its current building. With its collections quickly becoming too great for the space at hand, a new building that would be able to house all of the collections in separate sections of the Museum had been designed (*ibid.*). Provincial Museum's new location was opened in October 1913 and "remained for many years the only purpose-built in the former Yugoslavia" for a long time (*ibid.*).

After World War I, the changes in global political landscapes also brought about changes in terms of the Museum's fate. Throughout WWI, the Museum had been closed. Overall promotion of unity among the Southern Slavic nations resulted in the establishment of The Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes in 1918, renamed into Kingdom of Yugoslavia in 1929 (Lozić, 2015, p. 311). With the political changes that ensued, the cultural functionality and significance of the National Museum changed accordingly. With the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, which ceased to exist during the Second World War, and the socialist Yugoslavia established at its residue at the war's end, more efforts have been put forward to create a unifying, Yugoslav identity among the people, as to minimize the ethnic and religious differences in the republics of Yugoslavia. Consequently, the National Museum had been re-established as a regional institution, which mainly served for centralization of the power of Kingdom of Yugoslavia and the socialist Yugoslavia (Lozić, 2015, p. 313).

The period after World War II marked the establishment of communist regime in former Yugoslavia. For the National Museum, this meant much better funding from the regime, and

at the same time, gaining a status of “utmost importance” (Lozić, 2015, p. 313). The National Museum had become a central spot for strengthening and promotion of the unified Yugoslav identity (*ibid.*), which was especially practical, since Bosnia-Herzegovina had been referred to as the “small Yugoslavia” due to its religious, cultural and ethnic diversity. Nevertheless, the cultural reinforcement of the Yugoslav identity had become a focal function of the National Museum, as to overcome the ethnic and political clashes among the nations of the SFRY (*ibid.*). Additionally, until the Yugoslav Wars in 1992, National Museum had held numerous exhibitions in cooperation with other cultural institutions within SFRY, such as museums in Ljubljana, Zagreb or Skopje. Looking at its historical timeline up to the 1990s, it can be said that the National Museum had peaked in the period between 1945–1992.

The attempts to utilize National Museum and other similar institutions in order to overcome the national, ethnic and religious differences among the nations of Yugoslavia were not successful; the national identities leading to the re-emergence of nationalisms after the death of Yugoslav leader Tito in 1980 were stronger. The end of Yugoslavia was marked with wars; the death toll was the highest in the war that ravaged Bosnia-Herzegovina between 1992 and 1995. The Museum managed to continue its work throughout the armed conflict with immense efforts by the Bosnian-Herzegovinian armed forces and the Museum workers to protect it from devastation. While some of its parts had been significantly damaged during the war, the rest of it remained unharmed and the artefacts in the Museum were preserved (Lozić, 2015, p. 314; Mulalić Handan, 2015, p. 2). Even so, the Bosnian War had been the breaking point for the Museum’s success. Since the end of the War, little to no attention had been paid to the Museum, thus causing its further deterioration and loss of cultural and educational power in the region. Once a well-protected protected institution has been left in the hands of decay (Gavrankapetanović-Redžić, 2017).

Since 1995, the National Museum is considered as the cultural institution in Bosnia-Herzegovina the work of which emphasizes an all-national (state) over ethnic identity (Lozić, 2015, p. 315). Subsequently, the Museum became the recipient of aid and development work (*ibid.*). Paradoxically, its status of the beneficiary was not permanent, as the Museum lost all economic support in 2012 and was forced to close its doors for the public. From one of the most prominent cultural institutions in the region, the National Museum had become a victim of the post-Dayton political disputes among Bosnian-Herzegovinian politicians and ethnic tensions in the country.

The disorder that had come with the Dayton Peace Agreement (DPA) has had a severe impact on the work of the National Museum. Namely, the DPA-established political entities in Bosnia-Herzegovina have multiple-level ministries, organizations, and institutions responsible for various matters in the country. With that being said, the National Museum had legally received status of an institution at a state level (Popić-Filipović, 2012, p. 187). However, for the Museum to receive proper funding and general attention as a national-level institution, there must be a national-level entity responsible for managing it. However, Ministry of culture on a state level has never been established, hence leaving the Museum in a grey legal zone, unable to report to any legal or political body that would be held responsible. Generally speaking, in Bosnia-Herzegovina, the practice is that political entities on lower levels (i.e. cantonal) to take care of cultural institutions and organizations, whereas those institutions of higher significance are taken care of by the Ministry of Civil Affairs (*ibid.*). As a result of this, National Museum's funding comes from annual grants rather than a designated budget, which do not cover over 60% of the basic expenses in the institution (Popić-Filipović, 2012, p. 187).

Although it could be seen how, during certain periods in history (e. g. during the socialist Yugoslavia), the ethnic groups of Bosnia-Herzegovina had partially accepted the idea of a unifying Bosnian identity, nowadays political and ethnic divisions permeate cultural life in BiH. Some people would also argue that ethnic divisions were always there, but were, when they were not manifested so vividly (e.g. in the period of Yugoslavia), only quite successfully repressed by the then-political leadership. And virtually since the first medieval state of Bosnia, different religions (later ethnicities too) managed to coexist in Bosnia through centuries of political, societal and religious changes. Consequentially, however, the constant contest among the nations to promote their ethnic cultural heritage has become a normal phenomenon, where each of the constituent peoples living in BiH consider themselves as rightful heirs to govern BiH as a whole.

### **“Anti-museum”: paradoxical role of the Museum of Republika Srpska**

An example of the rivalry over ‘the right interpretation of history’ is the Museum of Republika Srpska, which explains the history of Republika Srpska in particular (one of the two political entities, which together with the Federation of BiH and the District of Brčko constitute the state of BiH). This museum challenges the narrative of BiH as one country.

Located in Banja Luka, it was established in 1930, originally named the Ethnographic Museum of Vrbas Banovina.<sup>4</sup> Throughout history, both the name and the location of the museum have been changed, until its final move to the Workers Solidarity House in 1982. There, the National Library of Republika Srpska and the Children's Theatre of Republika Srpska were also situated (Museums of the world, 2014). In comparison to the National Museum, its fundamental role was "to preserve the ethnographic culture of the region, the strengthening of regional identity and the consolidation of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia" (Lozić, 2015, p. 316).

The end of World War II brought certain changes to the Museum. Primarily, its name was changed into the State Ethnographic Museum of Bosnian Krajina (a sub-region of Bosnia-Herzegovina) (*ibid.*). In the period between the end of World War II and the beginning of the Yugoslav Wars, the State Ethnographic Museum of Bosnian Krajina put many efforts toward collecting "public items from the so-called People's Liberation War and the history of the communist party and its officials" (Lozić, 2015, p. 317). In 1961, the Museum was reorganized into following sections: "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" (*ibid.*).

Unlike the National Museum of BiH, such approach to the organization of the Museum of Republika Srpska showcases the continual commitment to promoting and strengthening of ethnic- and region-based character of the Museum. Furthermore, imagery presented in the Museum was of the nation's destiny and shared political ideologies (communism); imagery of various military operations, battles and sacrifice for the victory, as well as imagery of the civilians that had fought in WWII were frequent themes in the exhibitions (Lozić, 2015, p. 317). What is more, the regional character of the Museum was certainly strengthened through glorification of the National Liberation Army<sup>5</sup>, where "partisans were celebrated as the only liberating force and the military formation /.../. The communist party was depicted at the same time as the solitary guardian of Yugoslav federation and its principals" (*ibid.*). Moreover, "the slogan 'Comrade Tito we swear to you, from your path we will not stray'"

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<sup>4</sup> Banovina is a former administrative subdivision, established after the division of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia in 1929. It is important to note that banovinas were established only in 1929, and their role was solely administrative, with no political division of the Kingdom.

<sup>5</sup> National Liberation Army was a Communist-dominated force against the Axis powers in the occupied Yugoslavia during WWII.

was an essential element of the unification of the people, as well as of the establishment of a shared communist notion of brotherhood and unity (*ibid.*).

With the political changes and the establishment of Republika Srpska at the outset of the Bosnian War in 1992, the Museum gained its final name – the Museum of Republika Srpska (Lozić, 2015, p. 318). In a combination with the increased Serbian homogenization of the area – also a result of harsh persecution of all non-Serbs by the political-military structures of Bosnian Serbs during the war–, these changes symbolized a weakening of the unifying identity among the nations of BiH, as well as the foundation of the separatist ideologies of Republika Srpska. The Bosnian War was an especially strong push for the Museum to completely shift its focus solely toward the Serbian culture, heritage and religion.

Coincidentally, as stated by Lozić (2015), “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” (p. 319). Following that, in 1994, one of the exhibitions held in the Museum was about the history of Banja Luka depicting the city in 1920s and 1930s, however, completely lacking mosques, minarets, and other non-Serb buildings and spaces (Correia, 2013, p. 333). This form of replacement of history from ‘what was’ to ‘what should have been’ in the opinions of the Bosnian Serb leaders makes for a remarkable example of the nationalistic sentiment that had been nurtured for decades in Republika Srpska.

Even today, the same culture of neglecting the Bosniak elements can be seen in Republika Srpska and the Museum. Just from observing the exterior of the Museum, it can be seen how the writings on walls, entrances and signs are written in two languages – the Serbian Cyrillic and English – but not in Bosniak or Croatian, which are also official languages of BiH. The pursuit of an isolated, (Bosnian) Serb identity is visible in all elements of the Museum. As the fundamental institution for preservation and promotion of Serbian cultural heritage, traditions and history, Museum of Republika Srpska certainly puts a lot of effort into establishing a rather uniform, secessionist identity. To sum up, we can take Mendel and Steinberg’s (2011, p. 207) observation that, “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” (qtd. in Lozić, 2015, p. 320).

### **National, all-national, and/or trans-ethnic? Political struggle surrounding the National Museum during its closure**

On 4 October 2012, over a decade of struggle to maintain the National Museum with a halved staff and insufficient funding, the Museum closed its doors to public indefinitely, unable to find a way out of the piled-up issues.<sup>6</sup> After 124 years of its existence, the museum lost the battle against political indifference and ethnic divisions that had permeated the cultural sphere of Bosnia-Herzegovina. This event caused a range of reactions – while political actors still showed little concern over the Museum’s closure, the public had initially become very dissatisfied with the fact that there was no help for such an institution. The latter could be observed soon after the closure as the first public reaction was made by pupils from Bihać, a Bosniak-dominated city in north-western BiH, who organized peaceful demonstrations and urged the politicians to prevent the “cultural uricide” (Oslobođenje, 2012). Furthermore, they urged the politicians of all three ethnic background to do “everything possible” in order to reopen the National Museum.

Soon after the demonstrations in Sarajevo, Adnan Busuladžić, acting director of the museum, spoke for the first time after the closure. He emphasized that the National Museum needs a systemic solution and that it does not want ‘mercy’ of important international actors such as Great Britain (Šimić, 2012; Kultura, 2013). Not long after the first interview, the museum’s management and staff were subjected to public accusations of mismanagement, incompetence, and negligence (Filipović, 2014a; Apollo magazine, 2017).<sup>7</sup> This was also confirmed in our interview with Mirsad Sijarić (2019), current director of the National Museum, who was been working for the museum since the end of the Bosnian War. He said that “the attitude of the public, in most cases, is based on media reporting”, and emphasized

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<sup>6</sup> It is important to note that nine days prior to its closure, Carl Bildt, former High Representative for Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH), ‘tweeted’ that the inability to form a consensus on the financing of the National Museum by Bosnian politicians is a “European scandal” (Mozaik, 2012).

<sup>7</sup> First discrediting came from Haris Pašović, the director of the East West Theatre Company in Sarajevo, who said that the National Museum does not work and he does (Slobodna Bosna, 2014). This was then repeated by Šejla Kamerić and Amer Tikveša, two important Bosnian/Bosniak artists (ibid.) It is important to note that in 2014 Haris Pašović, who is close to the dominant Bosniak political party SDA, was named as a member of the interim Board of Directors by the Government of the Federation of BiH.

that “when the Museum closed, /they/ were represented in a very negative context, because a couple of culture workers in Sarajevo actively engaged in additionally punishing the workers from the museum because they have sought funding” (Sijarić, 2019). Here, the logic of the argument lies in Sijarić’s expectation that the support of their fellow cultural workers is ‘taken for granted’. This did not happen as there were two Bosnian/Bosniak artists – Šelja Kamerić and Amer Tikveša – who did not only delegitimized the claims allotted by the National Museum (the arguments from cultural workers to cultural workers are more convincing), but also provided a platform where the discrediting of the National Museum could occur.

One of the first concrete<sup>8</sup> political reactions regarding the National Museum came rather late, almost 18 months after its closure, when the Federation of BiH’s government decided to address the status of the National Museum (Filipović, 2014a). Minister of science and education of Federation of BiH Damir Mašić argued that “the National Museum belongs to all the citizens” and that “nobody has the right to close its doors, be it the president of the country, minister or the director”. Using these words, the minister directly attacked Adnan Busuladžić, director of the National Museum, who made the decision to close the National Museum (Slobodna Bosna, 2014). Furthermore, Mašić said that “the government on the Federal and Cantonal level assured 220.000 EUR, which is more than enough to reopen the National Museum”.<sup>9</sup> However, this did not happen as Busuladžić emphasized that this is not enough. This led to another political reaction, this time from Salmir Kaplan, Minister of culture and sports of Federation of BiH at the time. He argued that “if the country is guilty, the normal thing to do is to resign from the position of director” and that Adnan Busuladžić is “acting like a child who gets angry, takes the ball and says: ‘I am leaving, no one is going to play’” (Haler, 2014).

The decision of the Federation of BiH’s government to assure the financial means for the National Museum was not made with no strings attached, as they named interim Board of Directors. This decision was subjected to fierce reactions by the employees of National Museum, as their legal representative Emir Hasić argued that this decision is “illegal and unacceptable” (BH-Index, 2014). It is important to emphasize that the argument by the

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<sup>8</sup> We are using the term concrete as we have noticed one reaction prior to this. In 2013, Stjepan Kljuić, a member of the Sarajevo’s City Council argued that if each and every citizen of Sarajevo would have donated 1 EUR, the National Museum would quickly be reopened. However, the political elites or decision-makers did not react on his proposal.

<sup>9</sup> Here, it is important to note that the argument that 200.000 EUR is enough was first emphasized by Stjepan Kljuić, a member of the Sarajevo’s City Council (Oslobođenje, 2013; Oslobođenje, 2014a).

employees and their legal representative was based on the fact that the Board of Directors can only be named by the owner, which is the state of BiH. Contrary to the debates on the level of Federation of BiH, the biggest question that had to be resolved was on the inter-entity level as the public officials from the Republika Srpska were, from 2007 on, consistently rejecting the idea of a shared Bosnian cultural heritage. One of them was Sredoje Nović, who held the post of Minister of civil affairs of BiH, arguing that there were “no state institutions of culture in BiH” and that “culture was in the control of the entities” (Apollo, 2017). The idea that there are no state institutions in BiH was also indirectly recognized by one of our interviewees, a Bosnian Serb student, who emphasized that “even though the National Museum is very important to *them*, the Bosniaks allegedly exaggerated their side of the story” (Respondent 1, 2018).

In 2015, however, the political situation changed as Adil Osmanović became the Minister of civil affairs of BiH and swiftly insisted on the importance of the National Museum by framing it as an “all-national project” (Radević, 2014). This “all-national or trans-ethnic” dimension was also recognized by one of the interviewees, a Bosniak student, who argued that “the National Museum embodies the multinational and multicultural history of BiH” (Respondent 2, 2018). Following his statement, Adil Osmanović announced a concrete proposal to resolve the status of the museum by preparing a memorandum of financing the National Museum from the budget of Federation of BiH, the municipality of Sarajevo and some other municipalities of the Federation BiH (MKS, 2015).

This proposal, alongside with the financial support of the US Ambassadors’ Fund for Cultural Preservation (625.000 USD), led to the reopening of the museum, but triggered fierce reaction by the politicians from Republika Srpska. The most active one in this regard was Đorđe Miličević, a Bosnian Serb politician serving as Osmanović’s deputy; he attacked the memorandum stressing that “the National Museum is receiving millions while cultural institutions in Republika Srpska are receiving crumbs” (Apollo, 2017). Here it should be noted that this solution, which was defined as “a solution on systemic level”, only resolved the question of financing but failed to determine the “belonging” of the National Museum. This could be observed also in March 2019 when the Ministry of culture and education of Republika Srpska emphasized that the Council of Ministers of BiH “illegally finances the National Museum from the budget of the BiH” (Klix, 2019).

During the political fight to resolve the status and reopen the National Museum, the engagement by the local non-governmental organization Akcija (Action) through the campaign entitled “*Ja sam Muzej*” (I am the Museum) was crucial during the closure in at least two ways. First, a physical protection of the Museum with the help of many celebrities and artists being *dežurni* (on duty) was organized (Radević, 2015; Rexhepi, 2018); and second, by raising awareness of the international actors interested for the political stabilization of BiH.<sup>10</sup> The latter came rather late; the European Union (EU) recognized and financially awarded the NGO Akcija campaign alongside with “Europa Nostra” after the reopening in 2016. This was further elaborated by Mirsad Sijarić, the director of the National Museum, who criticized the EU for the lack of interest to actively participate in the museum’s protection (Sijarić, 2019):

I think that the attitude toward the National Museum is a micro-reflection of the attitude toward Bosnia-Herzegovina. Here, we feel how the European Union is pulling away from here in regard to politics, that it's applying some weird politics of non-involvement in issues. They abandoned us – not just European Union – the UN, USA, as well; they abandoned Bosnia-Herzegovina to depend on a constitution that came out of the Dayton Peace Agreement (DPA), which was concluded to end the War – which was stopped, but not ended.

Finally, an important indicator that the EU’s response was rather limited could be observed during the interviews we have conducted in BiH; the respondents argued that the EU could have financed National Museum. One interviewee believes this should be the case “in order to show that it is possible to work toward one identity in BiH” (Respondent 3, 2018). Here, we can also add another interviewee’s statement, a Bosniak, who said that “he is glad when he hears that the EU is promoting the projects that strive towards national unity” (Respondent 4, 2018). However, not all of the respondents are confident that the National Museum could function as an ‘all-national’ socio-cultural actor as they believe that it is worth trying but they do not think that “the people could ‘adopt’ the idea” (Respondent 5, 2018; Respondent 6, 2018). Interestingly, both of them were Bosniaks.

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<sup>10</sup> One important reaction that could not be neglected came from Slovenia, namely by Branimir Štrukelj, the president of the Confederation of Public Sector Trade Unions. He was, however, addressing BiH's decision-makers as a Secretary General of the Education, Science and Culture Trade Union of Slovenia (Slobodna Bosna, 2015). In an open letter, Branimir Štrukelj urged the politicians to assure the financial means in order to reopen the National Museum.

## **Conclusion**

The main rationale of the chapter has been driven by the fact that the predominant literature within the heritage and memory studies positions national and/or historical museums as an important socio-cultural actor within the process of constructing collective memory of a nation. Furthermore, the often-presumed role of museums as the institutions for nourishing the imagination of the community has been called into question when scrutinizing their function in post-conflict societies with unresolved past. Although in this chapter, we do not challenge the notion of a museum as a stage for the performance of myths of nationhood, we wanted to critically analyse the role of ‘national’ and/or ‘historical’ in socio-political environments. In such environments, distrust, resistance, and negligence are not something unimaginable, and the concept of ‘all-national’ and the concept of state are not inherently internalized by the members of different ethnic communities. The discussion on the latter, which was the general objective of this chapter, was done through the illustration of the National Museum, an ‘all-national’ museum in post-conflict BiH, where ethno-politics of the three constituent peoples is still vivid.

The National Museum of BiH was closed for three years due to financial problems that derived from the unresolved status as both political entities (Federation of BiH and Republika Srpska) failed to find an agreed-upon solution. In that regard, we tried to answer how the National Museum is understood in the context of post-conflict BiH’s society that is predominantly driven by ethno-political exclusivism. The empirical analysis, which was conceptually positioned within the studies on ‘contested heritage’, has showed that the unresolved status of the National Museum became a political matter almost 18 months after its closure. Moreover, this became an issue in a Bosniak-dominated Federation BiH, where the civic debates echoing loudly in the media were exploited by the politicians for their gains during the electoral year. Many voices in the media raised questions regarding the importance of financing the National Museum by confronting the rationality and legitimate claims by the workers and director to resolve the status.

What is more, the FBiH politicians did nothing to transcend the debate revolving around the alleged personal advantages of the artists that saw personal gains in the status’ unresolvedness. The debates on FBiH level were observed closely by the Bosnian Serb-dominated political entity Republika Srpska, whose stance on the question of the museum as an ‘all-national’, socio-cultural institution was clearly negated. The notion of “there is no

such thing as state institutions” became a part and parcel of the Bosnian Serbs’ argumentation and struggles with Bosniak politicians on the question of the role of BiH political entities. Such dynamics were also recognized by our interviewees, alongside with Mirsad Sijarić, the current director of the National Museum, who reflected on collective pessimism regarding both the future and function of the ‘all-national’ National Museum, as well as its nation- or state-building potential. Here, it is important to note our observation from the fieldwork that, while respondents who belong to the Bosniak community acknowledged the ‘all-national’ role of the National Museum as it fits their ideational imaginary of the nation or state, the Bosnian Serb interviewees did not share the same excitement. One possible reason for their indifference could be understood through the existence of the Museum of Republika Srpska, which ‘glues’ (Bosnian) Serb memories and their narratives together, with an aim to enable them the possibility to imagine themselves as a part of a (Bosnian) Serb – and not Bosnian-Herzegovinian state - collective imaginary.

Even though the situation changed after the elections in 2015 that consequently led to the reopening of the National Museum, its status is far from resolved. The solution – financing the National Museum from the budget of the Federation of BiH and municipality of Sarajevo – which was signalled as a solution on ‘systemic level’, did not resolve the legal dimension. One can argue that the lack of inter-entity agreement is keeping the ‘all-national’ dimension of the National Museum, which would, if the agreement would be reached, fall under the jurisdiction of the Bosniak-dominated Federation of BiH. This, in turn, would diminish the efforts made by various stakeholders to maintain the idea of the National Museum as a state-level, socio-cultural institution that is owned by all the peoples in BiH.

While the empirical focus of this chapter was on the National Museum, this analysis can be applied to great benefit in other cases. For example, the ongoing debate on the role of the Museum of Tolerance in Jerusalem, which was built against the background of the ongoing Israeli-Palestinian conflict, is contested by Palestinians as they believe that the museum may reach the point of erasing traces of Mamilla – historic Muslim cemetery located west of the walls of the Old City of Jerusalem – memory. Through its association with the Wiesenthal Center, the museum became means of symbolizing the memory of the Holocaust and of the Jewish heritage in the Jerusalem landscape. This analysis, however, is not limited to only deeply divided societies, but could also be applied to virtually any state that has troubled or colonial past. Our argument then, viewed more broadly, provides an illustration of the

necessary analytical synthesis of consequentialist behaviour of both political and civic actors, and their social frames when approaching ‘contested heritage’.

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