



# WER IST WALTER?

International Perspectives on  
Resistance in Europe during  
World War II

Edited by

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## Dealing with Yugoslav Resistance During World War II, Then and Now: The Case of the Museum of Yugoslavia

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The Museum of Yugoslavia in Belgrade is the result of the merger of two previous institutions: The Memorial Centre “Josip Broz Tito” and the Museum of the Revolution of Yugoslav Nations and Ethnic Minorities (*Muzej revolucije naroda i narodnosti Jugoslavije* – MRNNJ). The merger occurred in 1996, and the new institution was then called the Museum of Yugoslav History (*Muzej istorije Jugoslavije* – MIJ), until it was renamed as the Museum of Yugoslavia (*Muzej Jugoslavije*) in 2016. The merger and name change in the 1990s resulted from the sociopolitical changes that occurred with the break-up of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. Yugoslavia officially became an object of history when the MIJ was founded, pushing the Yugoslav experience into the past without the possibility of embedding it in the policies of the future and the process of reshaping post-Yugoslav societies. “Yugoslavia” persisted until 2003 as the official name of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia composed only of Serbia and Montenegro, in an attempt at continuity with the previous state of Yugoslavia. Placing an existing state’s name into a museum (not explicitly specified, but obviously referring to socialist Yugoslavia) was an act of open abandonment of the Yugoslav idea itself, which was deemed to now belong in a museum. In the words of museum curator Momo Cvijović, when the federal government created the new institution, “it seemed that the bosses at that point had in mind a showdown with the past, rather than great expectations for the future [...] One of the stories goes that the formation of the MIJ was only a mask, and that the real intention was to preserve the funds of the two abolished museums, whose names, at the time, were undesirable and irritated most of the public.”<sup>1</sup>

1 Momo Cvijović, “DicothoMY(H)”, in *MUSEUM of Yugoslavia* (Belgrade: Museum of Yugoslavia, 2016), 48.

The new Museum of Yugoslav History was established on the site of the abolished Memorial Centre “Josip Broz Tito”, with some solutions that were, let us say, paradoxical and untenable. The old museum’s entire art and cultural-historic contents were ceded to the new institution. All the collections of the also-closed MRNNJ were thrown in, while at the same time, the new institution was stripped of over two-thirds of the surrounding parklands and four of the most important museum buildings: Tito’s Residence, the Commemorative Collection in the Oval Building, the Hunting Lodge and the Pool House. In an even more absurd move, the federal government handed over the requisitioned real estate and all its contents to the newly-elected president of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, Slobodan Milošević, who, in 1997, moved with his family into Tito’s residence. At the time, it was physically separated from the area under the control of the Museum of Yugoslav History with a wall more than two metres tall. From the former Memorial Centre, three buildings constitute today’s Museum of Yugoslavia: The 25 May Museum (opened on 25 May 1962 for Tito’s 70th birthday), the Old Museum, and The House of Flowers, which is the resting place of Josip Broz Tito (1892-1980), and his wife, Jovanka Broz (1924-2013).

In order to understand the importance of dealing with resistance during World War II and its presentation in the Museum of Yugoslavia in the last decades, it is necessary to consider how the sociopolitical context has drastically changed since the time of socialist Yugoslavia. Socialist Yugoslavia was based on the myth of Partisan struggle, resistance and antifascism; World War II was considered constitutive for the creation of a new state and a new society. After the disintegration of Yugoslavia, there has been a revision of history: Two resistance movements have been introduced into the public discourse – Partisan and Chetnik – and the socialist period has been labelled as “totalitarian”. This formal legitimacy was given in 1996 by the Council of Europe Resolution 1096, which covered measures to dismantle the legacy of former communist totalitarian systems. Therefore, in the first part of the text, we will examine the Museum of the Revolution’s practices, and then observe the changes that have occurred in the way of displaying and interpreting the same items in the newly founded institution – the Museum of (History of) Yugoslavia. We will also consider the struggle of curators seeking objective presentation of facts regardless of political context and demands, lack of interest from the founders and the absence of state and social consensus. Given that this text’s authors, as curators of the

museum, have themselves participated in the processes they write about, and at the same time have been involved in the exhibition practices mentioned in the text, they have frequently been in a position to critically analyse all the mentioned periods and methodologies. Written from that ambivalent position, the paper is the result of practical experience and efforts at introspection, description and analyses of the problems encountered, as well as analyses of results of evaluation processes conducted during, and immediately after, the completion of the projects. The paper intends to open questions about the critical museum,<sup>2</sup> organisational structure and the institution's openness and functioning.

### **Museum of the Revolution as a promoter of antifascist values**

From the end of World War II to the mid-1960s, there was a pronounced tendency in Yugoslavia to establish museums of the National Liberation Struggle (*Narodnooslobodilačka borba* – NOB), memorial museums and museums of the revolution. In the first decade after the war, all republics' got a museum of the revolution. In Belgrade, the capital of Yugoslavia, within the Military Museum there was a segment dealing with the NOB, but there was no museum that dealt with the development of the workers' movement, i.e. the history of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia, which was the initiator of the antifascist movement.

Several discussions took place prior to the establishment of the Museum of the Revolution of Yugoslav Nations (*Muzej revolucije naroda Jugoslavije* – MRNJ) with the aim of determining whether such a museum was needed at all, whether there was public interest in it, and whether the available material was sufficient to show “the life of the broadest toiling masses and their movement towards progress”.<sup>3</sup> Discussions about the museum began in late 1955, and three years later, the procedure for its establishment was initiated.<sup>4</sup> On 19 April 1959, the Central Committee of the League of

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2 Pjotr Pjetrovski, *Kritički muzej* (Beograd: Evropa Nostra Srbija and Centar za muzeologiju i heritologiju Filozofskog fakulteta u Beogradu, 2013)

3 Milorad Panić-Surep, “Muzej revolucije naroda Jugoslavije”, *Bilten Muzeja revolucije naroda Jugoslavije*, no. 1, (Beograd: Muzej revolucije naroda Jugoslavije, 1963), 10.

4 Archives of Yugoslavia/*Arhiv Jugoslavije* – SR AJ, fond 297, Savez udruženja boraca Narodnooslobodilačkog rata – savezni odbor, fascikla 304, Sekcija bivših ratnih zarobljenika, Pripreme za izložbu. (8-8-4-2; 25.II 1956).

Communists of Yugoslavia (*Centralni komitet Saveza komunista Jugoslavije* – CK SKJ) decided to establish the Museum of the Revolution of Yugoslav Nations in Belgrade as the only federal museum in socialist Yugoslavia for promoting antifascist values and the revolutionary legacy of the Yugoslav peoples. A committee composed of representatives of political bodies, museum professionals and historians worked on the concept of the museum, formed commissions in the republics that would work on the history of the workers' movement of individual regions and made a plan for the development of the museum as an institution. According to Slavko Šakota, a historian and museum adviser of the Museum of the Revolution of Yugoslav Nations:

The central Museum of the Revolution, from its very beginning, has been assigned the role of creating an integral picture of the historical events on the Yugoslav soil of the last eighty years, dealing primarily with the key moments that are important for the whole... The museum will also represent the revolutionary struggle of ethnic minorities as well as the participation of neighbouring nations in the National Liberation Army of Yugoslavia. Two essential moments will be clearly outlined in the museum exhibition – the contribution of the Yugoslav Revolution to the international fight against fascism and the Yugoslav contribution to the world development of socialist theory and practice.<sup>5</sup>

On the basis of this project, on 9 December 1960, the President of the Republic, Josip Broz Tito, passed the Decree on the establishment of the Museum of the Revolution of Yugoslav Nations, and Milorad Panić Surep was appointed as the museum's director. According to the chronological division of future exposition and research, four museological departments were formed, within which the third department researched World War II in the territory of Yugoslavia. In anticipation of adequate accommodation and a new museum building, continuous work was done until 1969 to prepare the future permanent exhibition and thematic exhibitions. The Program Tasks of the MRNJ show that the curators of the third department

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5 Slavko Šakota, "Priprema se Muzej revolucije naroda Jugoslavije", *Muzeji, časopis za muzeološka pitanja*, no. 13 (Beograd: Savez muzejskih društava Srbije, 1960).

planned research in related museums throughout Yugoslavia, but also in the archives of the GDR and the Imperial War Museum in London.<sup>6</sup>

In 1963, it was planned to research the complete holdings of photographs of the *Borba* newspaper and, if necessary, copy over 2.000 photographs. It was also planned to collect and research materials for a future exhibition under the working titles of “Messages from the Executed” (*Poruke streljanih*) or “Messages from the Execution Sites” (*Poruke sa stratišta*). This exhibition was planned but not realised in 1966.<sup>7</sup> In that period and the following years, the museum’s holdings were enriched with dozens of items related to mass executions and suffering in the concentration camps. The collected, researched and processed material was displayed at the exhibition titled “Testimonies” (*Svedočanstva*), which opened on 13 December 1973 in the foyer of the Contemporary Theatre (today the Belgrade Drama Theatre) as a side program to the play “Day 13” by director and screenwriter Živorad Mihajlović.

In 1968, the museum council proposed that an exhibition be built in the building on Marx and Engels Square (Nikola Pašić Square) as part of the League of Communists of Yugoslavia’s 50th anniversary celebration. Bearing in mind that work on the MRNJ building had not progressed at the expected pace, this was a temporary solution that would enable the museum building to be constructed in stages in line with the financial inflow. A long-term exhibition titled “Half a Century of Revolutionary Struggle of the League of Communists of Yugoslavia” (*Pola veka revolucionarne borbe Saveza komunista Jugoslavije*) was opened in 1970. Events were presented chronologically and divided into four historical periods: 1871-1918; 1918-1941; 1941-1945 and 1945-1969, with 26 thematic units. The units dealt with events marking the development of the workers’ movement and Marxist thought, the political life of the newly-created state of Yugoslavia in the interwar period<sup>8</sup> with an emphasis on the Communist Party of Yugoslavia’s establishment and illegal activities, the occupation and antifascist struggle during World War II, the formation of socialist Yugoslavia and the period of one-party political life. The two central individuals in the exhibition were King Aleksandar Karađorđević and Josip Broz Tito, the president of socialist Yugoslavia.

6 SR AJ, fond 477, MRNNJ, fascikla 11, Programski zadaci MRNJ.

7 SR AJ, fond 477, MRNNJ, fascikla 12, Izveštaj o radu MRNNJ za 1966.

8 Yugoslavia was formed on 1 December 1918, as the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes. From 3 October 1929, it was called the Kingdom of Yugoslavia.



Fig. 1: Long-term exhibition titled “Half a Century of Revolutionary Struggle of the League of Communists of Yugoslavia”. (Photo: Museum of Yugoslavia)

The antifascist struggle and the national liberation movement in Yugoslavia were covered chronologically from the occupation in April 1941 to the last days of May 1945, when the battles for the liberation of the country were fought. War operations, the formation of concentration camps, life under occupation and life in Partisan units were displayed. The events marking World War II on the territory of Yugoslavia covered only one-fifth of the space. In the 1990s, this conception of the exhibition was criticised by factions in society that wanted to recast and revitalise the Serb nationalist Chetnik movement as antifascist. Among the critics, the loudest were those who had never even seen the MRNNJ exhibition, but persistently claimed that the museum was a place of communist propaganda and Partisan movement.

This exhibition eventually became a permanent exhibition in the museum, which in 1974 was renamed the Museum of the Revolution of Yugoslav Nations and Ethnic Minorities in accordance with the new constitution of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. For the next two decades, the museum’s curators followed the adopted concept, supplemented and expanded the exhibition in segments. The research was carried out in the archives and museums in all the republics, and the collection of items

continued by purchase and acquisition from numerous institutions or private collections from all over Yugoslavia. The war years were represented by uniforms, weapons, Partisan newspapers, section maps, photographs and personal items.<sup>9</sup> A special thematic unit covered civilians' suffering. Personal documents of those executed at Kragujevac and Kraljevo<sup>10</sup> in Serbia were displayed, along with messages and objects left behind by executed inmates of concentration camps in Germany, Banjica in Belgrade, Jasenovac in Croatia and Niš in Serbia. Photographs depicting scenes of violence and disturbing scenes of the victims were rarely used for these segments of the exhibition. Such photographs were exhibited only when the goal was highlighting resistance, or the courage or defiance of individuals as models and motivation for new generations. The most famous photos that were exhibited captured the hanging of Lepa Radić and the execution of Ljuba Čupić.<sup>11</sup> In the exhibition notes, the curators often showed the extent of the war with numbers: the number of Partisan units relative to the occupying forces, the number of victims and the number of people who were executed, the number of people who were taken to the concentration camps and more. In addition to the documentary and archival materials, the exhibition included a large number of works of art, paintings and sculptures by renowned Yugoslav artists, while drawings and graphics were implemented on panels as artistic additions to photographs and documents. The museum also prepared thematic exhibitions dedicated to women's participation in the National Liberation Struggle.

The sociologist Todor Kuljić writes that: "In the Communist culture of remembering fascism, the war period between 1941 and 1945 was skilfully summarised in the narrative of seven offensives".<sup>12</sup> In the MRNNJ, in addition to significant battles on the Yugoslav battlefield, the following

9 Thematic segments were: the April war and the 1941 uprising, the formation of Partisan units in the republics, battles of Neretva and Sutjeska, the Supreme Headquarters, the AVNOJ sessions, liberation, and the international recognition of Yugoslavia.

10 In October 1941, the German army killed more than 4.000 civilians in the cities of Kraljevo and Kragujevac.

11 Lepa Radić was a fighter in the Krajina Partisan detachment starting in 1941. She was 17 years old when she was executed on 11 February 1943, in Bosanska Krupa, Bosnia-Herzegovina. Čedomir Ljuba Čupić was the commissar of the Nikšić Partisan detachment; he was shot on 9 May 1942, in Nikšić, Montenegro.

12 Todor Kuljić, "Anti-antifašizam", *Godišnjak za društvenu istoriju*, year 12, no. 1-3, (Beograd: Filozofski fakultet – Udruženje za društvenu istoriju, 2005), 173. (Cyrillic) "The seven enemy offensives" was a term used in Yugoslav historiography for military operations of the Axis Powers against the Partisans between 1941 and 1944.



segments could also be seen: “Culture and Education in the NOB” (*Kultura i prosveta u NOB-u*),<sup>13</sup> “Organization and Development of the People’s Government 1941-1943” (*Organizacija i razvitak narodne vlasti 1941-1943*),<sup>14</sup> “Medical Corps in the NOB 1941-1945” (*Sanitet u NOB-u 1941-1945*),<sup>15</sup> and “The Tragic Results of the War and the Post-War Trials of ‘occupying forces members and their helpers’” (*Tragični bilans rata i posleratna suđenja ‘okupatorima i njihovim saradnicima’*).<sup>16</sup>

Working on the future permanent exhibition, the museum adviser, Slavko Šakota, who was an éminence grise of the museum with his professionalism, followed modern achievements in the field of museological presentation of recent history with the aim of implementing it in the exhibition with the help of architects and designers.<sup>17</sup> Thus, the exhibition contained the most modern technological devices of the time, such as built-in automatic carousel projections with about 80 slides for those who wanted to learn more about the topic. The maps of Yugoslavia were graphically stylized, depicting the occupation zones and the beginning of the uprising in 1941. A diorama of bombed Belgrade was made during the reconstruction of the thematic block “The Tragic Balance of the War” (*Tragični bilans rata*).

The restrictive number of events that found a place in the exhibition indicated a positivist approach to history with the aim of not disturbing the fragile national relations in a multinational state. The balanced representation of the history of all the Yugoslav nations, as well as the emphasis on the joint antifascist struggle and post-war reconstruction, should present brotherhood and unity as a natural continuation of the common desires of all nations, not just a politically placed supranational idea. Cultivating selective memory was an ideological tool and support for sociopolitical changes that occurred after 1945, as noted by Todor Kuljić:

13 This section exhibited photos of the Partisan theatre created in 1942, photos of artists and writers participating in the NOB, school supplies for children’s literacy classes in the liberated territory, the children’s magazine *Pionir*, Milan Stanković’s violin, etc.

14 National Liberation Committees hand stamps, photos, documents, bonds, etc. were exhibited.

15 Photographs of Partisan hospitals, evacuation and accommodation of the wounded, medical instruments, *Medical Gazette* and *Medical Corps Gazette* brochures and a painting *Transfer of the Wounded* by Ismet Mujezinović were on display.

16 In addition to the German officers, the Chetniks, the Ustashas, the Croatian Home Guard members, the Serbian State Guard members (*Nedićevci*) and other collaborators were tried.

17 SR AJ, fond 477, MRNNJ, fascikla 13, Izveštaj o radu MRNNJ za 1978.



Fig. 2: Long-term exhibition titled “Half a Century of Revolutionary Struggle of the League of Communists of Yugoslavia”. (Photo: Museum of Yugoslavia)

In socialist historiography, textbooks and memorial culture, antifascism and Partisan resistance have long been the central content of memory. The culture of memory was liberating, and antifascism was the crown of all liberation wars. The popularisation of the Partisan war was not only in the service of stipulated memory, but antifascism was also a mediator of other desirable non-ideological values (heroism, resistance, sacrifice). The central framework of historical memory was the NOB, and antifascism, with clearly separated positive heroes and negative villains, set the tone for the desired identity. The class polarisation of the war led to its ethnic neutralisation. The structure of the civil war was understood in a supranational sense: the occupying forces, the Quislings, the bourgeoisie and the monarchy on the one hand and the antifascist front headed by the KPJ on the other.<sup>18</sup>

18 Todor Kuljić, *Prevladavanje prošlosti, uzroci i pravci promene slike istorije krajem XX veka* (Beograd: Helsinški odbor za ljudska prava u Srbiji, 2002), 475-476.

In addition to the main activities, research and presentation, the museum organised events, lectures, literary evenings, recitals, film screenings, student quiz competitions and meetings with veterans. In 1972, these activities gave birth to the Red Theatre (*Crveni teatar*), which, in cooperation with the Association of Dramatic Artists of Serbia, dramatised revolutionary poetry, veterans' stories, and stage collages. Curator Dušica Mikičić stated that: "The main goal was to revive the exposition of the museum, the possibility of a different way of presenting the material and bringing it closer to the visitor, creating new experiences and representations by changing the relationship between media and content, transforming static two-dimensional exhibits on the move, playing audiovisual performances."<sup>19</sup> The dramatisation of the messages of communists sentenced to death in 12 European countries, titled "Defend Love" (*Branite ljubav*), was performed by the theatres in several towns in Serbia, Macedonia and Croatia. The MRN-NJ announced a public competition for authentic stories of veterans that had not been published before, for which a dramatisation was made under the title "I Will Never Forget" (*Nikada neću zaboravit*).<sup>20</sup>

## **New museum – new challenges: What to do with Yugoslavia and World War II?**

It may sound like a paradox, but by following the linear narrative of the Museum of Yugoslav History, a superposition becomes apparent in the historiographic narrative of the dissolution of Yugoslavia. A museum's history is always the history of worldviews and of control and power. Negative interpretations of socialist ideology, of Yugoslavness and of brotherhood and unity surfaced at the beginning of the 1980s. New nationalist symbols started taking over Serbian public space in order to perfidiously create the foundations of war in ex-Yugoslavia.<sup>21</sup>

In 1992, Dobrica Ćosić, as the first president of the new Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, raised the issue of the purpose and use of the buildings that belonged to the Memorial Centre "Josip Broz Tito" and the MRN-NJ.

19 Dušica Mikičić, "Reč kao muzeološki izraz u istorijskim muzejima" (Habil. diss., National Museum, Belgrade, 1974), 27.

20 SR AJ fund 477, MRNJ, folder 13, Report on the Work of the MRNJ for 1981.

21 Dubravka Stojanović, "U ogledalu Drugih", in *Novosti iz prošlosti*, ed. Vojin Dimitrijević (Beograd: Beogradski centar za ljudska prava, 2010), 13-31.

The idea of founding the Museum of Yugoslav History was also mentioned that year for the first time. In 1996, it was formed by governmental decree. The founding of a museum dedicated to a non-existent country – only five years after its breakup during the bloodiest war in Europe in the second half of the 20th century – was a purely political act:

Due to the sociohistorical circumstances that resulted in violent breakup and war between the nations that once formed Yugoslavia during the 1990s, these museums became a burden as witnesses of the unwanted past, traces of which were thoroughly erased from the present. It was a political decision that placed the collections of the two institutions under the same roof. Even though this musealization of Yugoslavia was supposed to “put it on the shelf” in accordance with the understanding of a museum as a storage place for “old and unnecessary things”, it turned out that the collections, histories, documentation and employees of these two institutions became the basis of a twenty years long search for ways of acknowledging Yugoslavia as a heritage.<sup>22</sup>

By no means was it the result of a thought-out cultural policy, or the desire for musealisation of Yugoslavia and socialist legacy. On the contrary, the legacy needed to be dealt with as something undesirable. Just like the legacy of antifascism and resistance preserved in the MRNNJ, which covered the National Liberation War out of which socialist Yugoslavia was created, evidence of the development of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia and the workers’ movement was undesirable. The memories had to be erased, eradicated or at least altered with regard to World War II, making room for a revised version of history. Slobodan Milošević’s regime had an ambivalent approach to the historical legacy of Tito’s Yugoslavia, which was described as both the dungeon of the Serbian people and the country in which all Serbs in the region had lived. This ambivalence made the de-Titoisation of Serbia sudden and chaotic. As of the beginning of the 1990s, photographs of Tito in schools were replaced with those of Vuk Karadžić, the Serbian language reformer, Saint Sava, the first Serbian archbishop and Milošević

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22 “The Origins: The Background for Understanding the Museum of Yugoslavia”, Museum of Yugoslavia, <https://www.muzej-jugoslavije.org/en/predistorija-osnova-za-razumevanje-muzeja-jugoslavije/>. All quoted internet sources were last accessed on 30 January 2024.

– symbols of the specifically Serbian national identity being constructed. Tito's name was removed from the names of cities and towns, and his busts were removed from public spaces. In spite of that, many towns in ex-Yugoslav countries kept the name of Tito for streets and squares, although they often moved it from main streets to the suburbs. There are 12 streets and a square named after Tito in the suburbs of Belgrade. After Milošević's regime was toppled in 2000, the new authorities took things even further, trying to establish themselves as the liberators who cast off communism's shackles and everything the Socialist Party of Serbia had stood for in the 1990s.<sup>23</sup> This was apparent in their legal equation of the Chetnik movement with the Partisans,<sup>24</sup> the public affirmation of the Chetnik movement as antifascist in essence and changes of the names of streets, holidays, laws, schoolbooks and monuments. Milošević was presented to the public as the last European communist in order to divert attention from his nationalism. That nationalism did not disappear when Milošević left the political scene, since his national agenda was shared by numerous parties that participated in the new system.<sup>25</sup> The Serbian state still promotes a narrative about "national reconciliation" between supporters of the Chetniks and the Partisans, which is most visible at the Victory Day celebrations every 9 May.

The equalisation of the two movements and the depiction of the Chetniks as a resistance force is reflected in the museums in the display of items belonging to Chetniks together with items belonging to Partisans. Maybe the most characteristic example is presenting two warrants side by side: the warrant for "gang leader Draža Mihailović" and the warrant for "Communist leader Tito". Both warrants were made by the same printing company in July 1943, and presenting them like this contributed to the construction of the narrative that the Chetniks were an antifascist movement.<sup>26</sup> The Museum of Yugoslavia also has the aforementioned warrants on display,

23 After the opposition had won the local elections, Zoran Đinđić, the first democratically elected mayor of Belgrade, personally took down the five-pointed star from the City Hall dome on 21 February 1997 and took it to the Museum of Yugoslav History. It was replaced with the two-headed eagle, the traditional heraldic symbol of Serbia.

24 "Izmene Zakona o pravima boraca, vojnih invalida i članova njihovih porodica kojima se pripadnici Ravnogorskog pokreta u pravima izjednačavaju sa partizanima", *Službeni glasnik Republike Srbije*, no. 137/04 (2004).

25 Dubravka Stojanović, "U ogledalu 'drugih'" in *Novosti iz prošlosti*, ed. Vojin Dimitrijević (Beograd: Beogradski centar za ljudska prava, 2010), 17.

26 For more about the historical revisionism in museums in Serbia, see: *Politički ekstremizmi u muzejima Srbije*, ed. Nebojša Milikić, Vahida Ramujkić, Dragomir Olujić Oluja (Beograd: Rex, 2018).



Fig. 3: Warrants for “gang leader Draža Mihailović” and “Communist leader Tito”, 1943. (Photo: Gavrilo Masniković, Museum of Yugoslavia, 2020)

but seeks to problematise them and open a dialogue about the narrative of “two antifascist movements”. Interestingly, the warrant for “Communist leader Tito” was acquired in 1961 by the curators of Museum of Revolution of Yugoslav Nations, which handled it within the main collection. In 1974, the warrant for “gang leader Draža Mihailović” was acquired from the Institute of Military History, finding its museological place in the auxiliary collection of the Museum of the Revolution of Yugoslav Nations. Back when the Museum of the Revolution of Yugoslav Nations was established, there was no dilemma regarding the roles of either Josip Broz Tito, or Draža Mihailović during World War II.

Societies undergoing transition look for new identities by revising previous ones. The confusion in Serbian society was mirrored by the confusion in which the museum operated, within the federal framework, but outside the competences of the Ministry of Culture or any other ministry. It was an independent federal organisation until April 2003, when the Serbian parliament accepted a provision determining that the MIJ would become an organisation of the Serbian state within the competences of the Ministry of Public Administration and Local Self-Government. In November 2007, the Serbian government decided to re-found the MIJ as an institution devoted to culture. Along with this, the museum worked on developing

a future permanent exhibition on Yugoslavia from 1918 to 1991, initiated by the new museum management under the project title “New Old Museum” (*Novi Stari Muzej*). The idea was not to show a timeline of crucial events, but to cover some important phenomena and features that left their mark on the countries and the societies in the country that was known, for more than 70 years, as Yugoslavia. The conceptual choice to focus on specific phenomena and themes allowed the exhibition team, charged with developing a pilot version of the permanent exhibition, to simply skip or neutralise World War II, treating it as one of discontinuities of Yugoslavia, along with the 1990s. In the first part of the exhibition “Yugoslavia: from the Beginning to the End” (*Jugoslavija: od početka do kraja*), which was titled “Yugoslavia – ID” and opened in 2012, there was a map of Yugoslavia during World War II that showed and explained all the military formations that fought in Yugoslavia at that time. The only caption concerning World War II was quite general and neutral:

During World War II, the Kingdom of Yugoslavia was ripped apart and a number of provisional state structures formed in its occupied territory. The four-year chaos that followed was not only a war against the occupying forces, but it also had the features of a remarkably cruel inter-ethnic and ideological war where everybody fought everybody else and more than a million people perished. The end of World War II brought big changes. In addition to territorial changes, the capitalist social system was replaced by the socialist one, while the monarchy was replaced by a federation consisting of six republics.<sup>27</sup>

The exhibition elicited different reactions and emotions. Visitors contacted us day in, day out, wishing to tell us their memories and views on the history of Yugoslavia, a country that lived on in them. A good example of that would be the Association for the Truth about National Liberation War and Yugoslavia (*Društvo za istinu o NOB i Jugoslaviji*), which organised a roundtable discussion in May 2012 in honour of the 120th anniversary of Tito’s birth. It was dedicated to criticising the international scientific conference held in May 2010 by the Institute for Recent History of Serbia

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<sup>27</sup> Ana Panić ed., *Yugoslavia: from the Beginning to the End* (Belgrade: Museum of Yugoslav History, 2013), 7.

(*Institut za noviju istoriju Srbije*), Archives of Yugoslavia (*Arhiv Jugoslavije*) and the Institute for East and Southeast European Research (*Institut für Ost- und Südosteuropaforschung*) in Regensburg, Germany, because they disagreed with their historical narrative. Branko Kosić wrote:

The international conference with the motto the time has come to scientifically elucidate Tito's Age, was followed by the opening of the controversial exhibition "Yugoslavia: From the Beginning to the End" in the May 25 Museum, and the projection of movies *Kino Komunisto*, *Goli Otok* and others, which clearly shows that this was all part of a greater and long-term denunciation of the NOR, socialism, SFRY and Tito, with the support of foreign sponsors and the government.<sup>28</sup>

Opinions that differ from their own even slightly are discarded and perceived as an attack on Yugoslavia, and themselves as well. They see themselves as Yugoslavia's makers, who know the truth about it the best (as implied by the organisation's name).

We understood that the number of histories of Yugoslavia equaled the number of people who lived in the country, and that the personal memories of these millions of witnesses would and could never be identical, neither to one another, nor to what would be shown in the museum. Whatever is displayed, there will always be something missing, there will be too much of something else, or that which is exhibited will not correspond to someone's personal memories, because history and memories are not synonymous.<sup>29</sup>

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28 Branko Kosić, "O viđenju i tumačenju Tita u Zborniku Instituta za noviju istoriju Srbije", in *Zbornik radova sa Okruglog stola o Josipu Brozu Titu*, ed. Mladenko Colić (Beograd: Društvo za istinu o NOB i Jugoslaviji, 2013), 385-393.

29 For more on the New Old museum project and the exhibition "Yugoslavia: from the Beginning to the End", see Ana Panić, "Holistički pristup u evaluaciji projekta Novi Stari Muzej ili kako učiti na sopstvenim uspesima i greškama", in *Zbornik radova Historijskog Muzeja Bosne i Hercegovine 12*, eds. Elma Hašimbegović and Elma Hodžić (Sarajevo: Historijski Muzej Bosne i Hercegovine, 2017), 20-45; Tijana Vuković, "Museum of Yugoslavia. New Old Museum: Change of Perspective from Yugonostalgia to Performativity and Popularisation", in *Regaining the Past. Yugoslav Legacy in the Period of Transition*, ed. Tijana Vuković (Warsaw: Faculty of "Artes Liberales", University of Warsaw, 2022), 139-179.



## **New chapter: Approaching Yugoslavia and antifascist resistance through personal perspectives**

Changing the name of the museum to Museum of Yugoslavia perhaps paradoxically removed the burden of presenting the whole history of Yugoslavia. Museum management decided to support the initiative of changing the name during the collective work on the strategic project to celebrate a century since the beginning of the southern Slavic peoples' first state: "The initiative to change the name to Museum of Yugoslavia is an effort to redirect the scope of research and musealisation to a range of phenomena that mark Yugoslav heritage and Yugoslav experience, which have, for some time, been recognized in the current museum practice."<sup>30</sup>

Aware of the fact that memories are subjective and are constructs of the past from the current perspective, our idea was to incorporate memories into the already established historical framework, which is based on relevant scientific research, jointly painting a balanced picture of Yugoslavia. In that way, we relinquish our position of power and share it with other experts, different communities, members of social groups, artists and the audience. By decolonising the museum in this way, we transfer control over its legacy to those who are featured in it and to whom that legacy belongs. The museum has changed its methodology and curators started their research from artefacts as the main resources. As of 2020, we have started using the topics that we periodically introduce as keys to figuring out not only the meaning and significance of certain subjects important for understanding the experience of life in Yugoslavia, but also their relevance in modern times. Each new topic is organised in the form of a route that visitors can take through what we call the "Museum Laboratory" and through which the museum curators create a plurality of voices and narratives.<sup>31</sup> The work process enables different forms of participation, allowing people to share and use the knowledge that is produced. "The End of World War II" (*Kraj Drugog svetskog rata*) was the first topic chosen, in connection to the celebration of the 75th anniversary of the victory over fascism in World War II. Marked items invite visitors to ponder about this turning point in world and Yugoslav history.

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30 "Towards the new conception", in MUSEUM of Yugoslavia (Belgrade: Museum of Yugoslavia, 2016), 52.

31 "Museum Laboratory", Museum of Yugoslavia, <https://muzej-jugoslavije.org/en/exhibition/laboratorija-muzeja-jugoslavije>.



Fig. 4: “Museum Laboratory”. (Photo: Relja Ivanić, Museum of Yugoslavia, 2021)

We espoused a personal approach to the topic and each curator was invited to contribute, because we were aware of the difficulty or even impossibility of agreeing on a common approach to World War II.<sup>32</sup> When we started talking about the artistic items we considered important to exhibit on the occasion of the 75th anniversary of the end of World War II, we immediately had a picture of two sculptures of victory from the “Collection of Gifts to Josip Broz Tito – Fine Arts” in mind. Although they were exhibited at similar events in 2005 and 2015 – exhibitions organised by the museum on the occasions of the 60th and 70th anniversaries of the victory over fascism in World War II, we did not really have much information about them. In the museum documentation, both are listed as works of unknown authors and are exhibited as such. Both were located in Tito’s Belgrade residence, in places that were not particularly prominent: one in the billiard room, the other in the gallery on the first floor.

Looking at these two sculptures next to each other, both made of bronze and placed on pedestals of red marble, we were particularly interested in

32 On the occasion of the 75th anniversary of the end of World War II, we asked our collaborators: “What is the first thing that comes to your mind when we talk about the end of the Second World War in Yugoslavia?” and recorded their short statements for YouTube. Muzej Jugoslavije, “#75godinaodkrajara”, Youtube playlist, 18 April 2023, <https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLuJ0Xl-3pON4Q-JoffwD1caCDEWhRhwo9>.



Fig. 5: Left: Unknown author, "Victory", before 1950. Gift from the Party Organization at the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia to Josip Broz Tito, 24 May 1950. Right: Jozef Kostka, "A Study for the Monument to the Liberators in Bratislava", 1946. Gift from free Bratislava to Josip Broz Tito. (Photos: Museum of Yugoslavia).

something that first caught our eyes. Both sculptures are dominated by a female figure. Namely, they are about accepting and exploiting old norms such as "Liberty Leading the People", which seek to adapt to new narratives. The sculpture, along with featuring seven figures on the pedestal, bears a dedication plaque reading: "To our teacher and dearest friend Tito. Party organisation at the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia, May 25, 1950", engraved in Cyrillic letters. It also has a signature telling us that it was cast in one of the oldest art foundries in Serbia, the renowned "Plastika", where the most prominent Serbian and Yugoslav sculptors made their works. Although we have not yet been able to find out who the author of this quality sculpture is, we can assume that it is a study for a monument that was not constructed. The female figure, unlike Liberty in the famous painting by Eugene Delacroix, does not communicate with the representatives of the people who she leads to a victorious assault. She does not look back, with the flag raised in front of her; she looks ahead, to the future, and is accompanied by figures of fighters with weapons, workers with hammers, axes and pickaxes, and female peasants with ears of corn. These figures

speak to the inseparability of class struggle and armed resistance to fascism. The sculpture also celebrates the values of gender equality developed in World War II through a female figure with a pencil symbolising women's enlightenment through literacy and adult literacy courses as prerequisites for achieving equality.

The second sculpture is a study, from 1946, of the "Liberty" monument to the Red Army in Bratislava, Slovakia, by the sculptor Jozef Kostka. This sculpture is typical of post-war works influenced by Soviet socialist sculpture, from years when Yugoslavia was ideologically close to the USSR. Examples of these sculptures include Antun Augustinčić's "Monument of Gratitude to the Red Army" near Batina, Croatia, on the Danube, erected in 1947. In the early 1950s, monuments celebrating victory through the symbol of a female figure were still made. One example is the "Liberty" monument on Iriški Venac, the summit of Fruška Gora Mountain, Serbia, the work of renowned sculptor Sreten Stojanović. However, such monuments were soon superseded by monuments to fallen soldiers and innocent victims that arose from the need to preserve the memories of all those killed amid the horrors of war, fighting and suffering, to homogenise the multinational, multiethnic and multireligious Yugoslav population, and to glorify the National Liberation War as an integrative factor that gave legitimacy to the new Yugoslavia.

Today, almost 80 years since the victory over fascism in World War II, and after the experience of the wars of the 1990s, we can only wonder which victory and whose resistance we are celebrating, given the new problems we have in our society: ethnicisation of antifascism and de-ideologisation tactics that focus on national reconciliation as advocated by Serbia's official state politics.<sup>33</sup>

## Conclusion

Museums preserve memories and with modern interpretations of the past, encourage visitors to actively comprehend the present. They are established in accordance with the current state policies of memory and their goal is

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33 For more information on renationalisation and ethnonationalisation of the museums' narratives, see: Nataša Jagdhuhn, *Post-Yugoslav Metamuseums. Reframing Second World War Heritage in Postconflict Croatia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, and Serbia* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2022), especially 147-153.

to create a collective memory. We have shown how the Museum of the Revolution of Yugoslav Nations and Ethnic Minorities was founded with the idea of musealising the ongoing revolution, starting with the working class's struggle before World War I, through the struggle for liberation in World War II, and ending with the post-war reconstruction of the country and economic development, which was accompanied by general modernisation, emancipation and urbanisation. The goal of the MRNNJ's exhibitions was the homogenisation of the population and the development of a sense of community and solidarity despite ideological, national, religious and regional differences. This contrasts with the 1990s, when past events were used as a means of mobilisation for war and as proof that conflicts between nations in this region are eternal, inevitable and necessary.<sup>34</sup> Spirals of fear and violence were deliberately set in motion by recalling the massacres and commemorating the victims of World War II, cultivating a climate in which differences in nationality prevail over the closeness of neighbours, old fears and suspicions are awakened, and neighbours turn into criminals.<sup>35</sup> Museums of the revolution, which existed throughout Yugoslavia, have been transformed into museums of recent history or absorbed into already existing museums of national history, whereby collections acquired new meanings and items were interpreted anew in accordance with the newly created nation-states' national interests.<sup>36</sup>

The Museum of Yugoslavia is in a different situation because it holds Yugoslavia itself, a supranational state. This is precisely its uniqueness. It is a unique institution keeping the collections of the two institutions that took on the burden of being witnesses to the unwanted past under the same roof. It is a "one-of-a-kind institution that officially inherits Yugoslav ideas and history, because of which it has both one-of-a-kind potential and a one-of-a-kind burden of responsibility".<sup>37</sup> Our vision for the future, and an opportunity for the Museum of Yugoslavia, which inherits an unwanted and dissonant legacy, has been to open the museum's collections dealing with the fight against fascism and share them with artists, scientists, cu-

34 Hrvoje Klasić, *Bijelo na crno. Lekcije iz prošlosti za budućnost* (Zagreb: Ljevak, 2019), 79.

35 Ksavije Bugarel, *Bosna. Anatomija rata* (Beograd: Fabrika knjiga, 2004), 118-142.

36 For more on (re)musealization of World War II in Yugoslavia's successor states, see Jagdhuhn, *Post-Yugoslav Metamuseums*, 175-244.

37 Višnja Kisić, *Governing Heritage Dissonance: Promises and Realities of Selected Cultural Policies* (Amsterdam: European Cultural Foundation, 2016), 149. For more on musealising Yugoslavia, see: *Ibid.*, 189-237.

rators and various communities who will read and interpret it in different ways. We aim to universalise the Yugoslav experience, which is more relevant than ever in today's world. People oppressed by increasing poverty, crises, and fear of new wars and conflicts need to recall the fight against fascism, examples of resistance, heroism and courage, and be shown historical examples of resistance as motivation for a new form of resistance to the injustices we witness in the world today.

# WER IST WALTER?

Resistance against Nazism, fascism, occupation and collaboration occurred throughout Europe during World War II. But how much do we know about this history in other European countries? Gathering 32 contributions and case studies on the history of this resistance, as well as on its transmission after 1945, especially in museums, the present book is an invitation to look at resistance in Europe in an interdisciplinary, international, transnational and comparative perspective. It is the result of the international research project “Wer ist Walter? Resistance against Nazism in Europe” which gathered historians, curators and other researchers mainly from Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, France and Germany.



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