



WER IST WALTER?

International Perspectives on
Resistance in Europe during
World War II

Edited by

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Narrating the Glorious Resistance: The Permanent Exhibition of the Museum of the Revolution of Bosnia and Herzegovina

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Germany's capitulation in May 1945 marked the end of World War II in Europe. With it began the gruelling task of rebuilding war-torn countries, Yugoslavia among them. The Communist Party of Yugoslavia (*Komunistička partija Jugoslavije* – KPJ) arose from the war as the dominant power in the country, both politically and militarily. Apart from the obvious task of rebuilding the country, the KPJ also aimed to pursue its goal of creating a new socialist society founded upon the principles of “brotherhood and unity” between Yugoslavia's different nations. The achievements and legacy of the People's Liberation Struggle (*Narodnooslobodilačka borba* – NOB), fought between 1941 and 1945, were fundamental to achieving that goal. On that account, the newly formed Federal People's Republic of Yugoslavia dedicated much of its attention to creating institutional and organisational mediums to convey and promote the values and the legacy of the NOB. One of them were newly created museums, envisioned to narrate and celebrate the antifascist resistance and revolution led during the war. These were established in each of the republics of the new Yugoslavia.¹

As a direct result of this state policy, on 28 November 1945, the Museum of People's Liberation of Bosnia and Herzegovina was established in Sarajevo, the capital of the People's Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina. The legal act defined the primary task of the museum as follows: “to collect, preserve, and present all the items and documents about the NOB and its legacy; to collect, research, and publish all materials referring to the history of the

1 On the importance of remembering the joint antifascist resistance on all levels of the new state and of the NOB as a foundational myth of Yugoslavia, see: Nataša Jagdhuhn, *Post-Yugoslav Metamuseums – Reframing Second World War Heritage in Postconflict Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Serbia* (Cham: Pelgrave Macmillan, 2022), 1-2.

NOB; to nourish and protect the memory of national heroes and victims of fascism, of heroism, and of the sacrifice of our people during the NOB.”²

After its creation in 1945, the museum used the premises of other institutions across Sarajevo such as the National Museum (1945-1950) and the City Hall building (1950-1963). In 1967, it was renamed the Museum of the Revolution of Bosnia and Herzegovina indicating that its thematic approach had broadened beyond just World War II. However, the latter continued to be a centrepiece of the history of Bosnia and Herzegovina and its revolutionary journey through the centuries. The first work on a new building began in 1957, when Moni Finci was appointed as the director.³ Work was completed in 1963, and three years later, on 25 November 1966, the Museum of the Revolution presented its permanent exhibition to the public.⁴ The exhibition was divided into four main “sectors,” as the museum documentation refers to it, representing different periods in Bosnia and Herzegovina’s history.⁵ To create the exhibition, the Museum used around 1.500 different artefacts, such as three dimensional objects, photos, documents, leaflets, and specially commissioned artwork by the most famous artists in the country, among them Vojo Dimitrijević and Ismet Mujezinović. The exhibition started with a summary of the history before 1878, and the first sector covered the Austro-Hungarian occupation period

2 Dušan Otašević and Dušan Kojović, *Muzeji novije istorije* (Sarajevo: Muzej Revolucije BiH, 1987), 153.

3 Salomon Moni Finci was the director of the Museum of the Revolution from 1957 until 1972. He had been part of the Partisan movement from 1941 to the end of the war. “Biography”, *Moni Finci – Remembrance & Legacy*, <https://monifinci.com/biografija/>. All quoted internet sources were last accessed 15 October 2023. On the construction of the new building, see Boro Pištalo, “Trideset godina Muzeja Revolucije Bosne i Hercegovine”, in *Zbornik radova – Proceedings 1*, ed. Tonči Grbelja (Sarajevo: Muzej Revolucije BiH, 1975), 237-238.

4 25 November was chosen because on that day in 1943, the first session of the State Anti-fascist Council for the People’s Liberation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (*Zemaljsko antifašističko vijeće narodnog oslobođenja Bosne i Hercegovine – ZAVNOBiH*) took place. ZAVNOBiH laid the foundations of the future Republic of BiH within socialist Yugoslavia. This was celebrated as Republic Day. In the opening speech, Moni Finci stated: “Today, on 25 November 1966, as part of the celebration of the jubilee 25th anniversary of the uprising and revolution and in honour of the Republic Day, the collective of the Museum of Revolution hands over to the public, our socialist community, present and future generations, and especially the youth, this Museum as a new institution.” History Museum of Bosnia and Herzegovina/*Historijski muzej Bosne i Hercegovine* (HMBiH) – Documentation Center, *Speech of Moni Finci during the opening ceremony*, 1966.

5 Dušan Kojović, who was part of the museum’s staff from 1958 to 1987, stated that the Museum of the Revolution should create exhibitions so that the revolution would be more emphasised and presented in conjunction with social and historical processes leading up to it. Otašević and Kojović, *Muzeji*, 211-212.

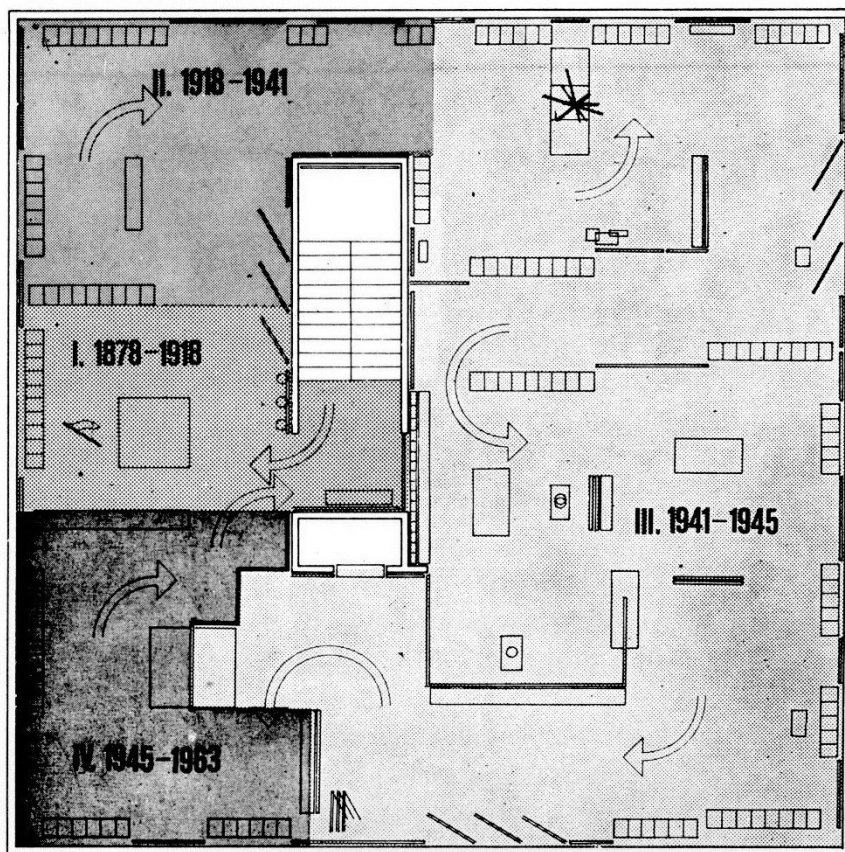


Fig. 1: The layout of the “Cube” by sectors.
 (Source: *The Museum of the Revolution – A Guidebook*, 3-4).

from 1878 to 1918. The next sector exhibited the Kingdom of Yugoslavia (1918-1941). The largest and most elaborate sector covered the timeframe from 1941 to 1945, displaying the events of World War II and the NOB in Bosnia and Herzegovina. According to the exhibition guidebook, almost 900 items were used in the third sector alone. The exhibition’s final section showed the period from 1945 until 1963, displaying the rebuilding of the country after the war.⁶

The exhibition was situated in the so-called “Cube”, which was the museum’s largest exhibition space and centrepiece.⁷ Its opening was a big step

6 Tonči Grbelja, Dušan Kojović and Dušan Otašević, *The Museum of the Revolution – A Guidebook* (Sarajevo: The Museum of the Revolution, 1986), 3-4.

7 *Ibid.*, 3-4.

toward establishing the museum as the central institution for collecting, researching, and presenting heritage of World War II and creating a collective memory and identity. Over almost 30 years, the exhibition welcomed many important guests such as Josip Broz Tito and his wife in 1969, different foreign delegations, ambassadors, and hundreds of school classes from all parts of Bosnia and Herzegovina. With the changing political landscape and the dissolution of Yugoslavia during the 1990s, including the independence of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the war that followed, the exhibition was taken down in 1992, without ever having been changed since its opening. One year later, the museum changed its name to the History Museum of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

This article will focus on the main part of the permanent exhibition, covering the timeframe of 1941-1945. What was the narrative about World War II and how was it presented in the exhibition? When analysing the narrative, I will mainly deal with three aspects: the representation of the Ustasha, the Chetniks and the Communist Party/Partisans. What was emphasised, and what was not? And for which reasons? I proceed in this way because, by analysing and questioning the warring parties mentioned above, there is room for cross-sectional analysis and comparison. This not only leads to identifying the pillars on which the exhibition and its narrative created a clear separation between fascist and anti-fascist forces, but also whether there was a distinction between fascist forces themselves within the exhibition. The museum was one of the mediums for promoting the NOB's legacy, and when analysing its exhibition narrative, it is important to point out that the historiography in the 1950s was heavily influenced by the ruling KPJ's views on the topic of World War II and the NOB. Throughout Yugoslavia, works of KPJ officials and Tito were the primary benchmarks for shaping the image of said events.⁸

Key sources of information for conducting the research presented in this article were the documents "Thematic plan of the main exhibition", dated from 1964, and "Legends and texts – final redaction", dated from 1965-1966, which come from the museum's archives. Because their origins are two years apart, the two documents offered an insight into the exhibition's structure but also offered a chance to cross-examine the two. Through

8 Snježana Koren, "Drugi svjetski rat u člancima i govorima Josipa Broza Tita (1940.-1948.)", in *Intelektualci i rat – 1939.-1947.*, eds. Drago Roksanđić and Ivana Cvijović Javorina (Zagreb: Plejada, 2012), 197-198.

that comparison, I could conclude that the plan from 1964 was indeed the one upon which the exhibition was built. On the other hand, both documents proved challenging to work with since the authors are not known by name and the reasons behind certain choices and changes are not explicitly mentioned in them.⁹ It is also important to point out that due to not having all the documents about the exhibition and its creation available, the answers to the question why certain strategies were employed by the exhibition team will mostly be my interpretations and opinions.

The Ustasha: “A tool” in the hands of the fascists

The first topic in the exhibition was named “The Occupation” and was divided into three subtopics: “Bosnia and Herzegovina under German-Italian Occupation”, “Bosnia and Herzegovina as part of the Independent State of Croatia”, and “Surrender of the Economy to the Occupiers – The Robbery of Natural Resources”.¹⁰ The introductory text for the topic stated: “The quisling Independent State of Croatia, with Bosnia and Herzegovina as a part of it, represented the German-Italian occupation zone.” Elaborating further on the creation of such a state, it was emphasised that the Independent State of Croatia (*Nezavisna Država Hrvatska* – NDH) gathered support from “conservative catholic clergy”, the former leading figures of the Croatian Peasant Party (*Hrvatska seljačka stranka* – HSS), and Yugoslav Muslim Organisation (*Jugoslovenska muslimanska organizacija* – JMO).¹¹ Besides them, much support came from “the most backward parts of the Muslim and Croatian population”. This description sent a strong message on the nature of such a state, merely by listing the people who supported it.

After presenting some general information about the NDH, the exhibition shifted its focus to the establishment of the NDH through a combination of three-dimensional objects, photographs and archive material.

9 HMBiH – Documentation Center, Thematic plan of the main exhibition – second part (*Tematsko-ekspozicioni plan glavne izložbe – Dio drugi*), 1964; HMBiH – Documentation Center, Exhibition texts – Final Redaction (*Legende i tekstovi – Definitivna redakcija*), 1965-66. I discovered some changes and alterations occurring from 1964 to 1966 by comparing both documents. I will present these in the following parts of the article.

10 HMBiH, *Thematic plan*, Topic 15. The numbering of the topics in the thematic plan for the section 1941-1945 begins with 15; topics 1 to 14 refer to the two previous sections about 1878-1918 and 1918-1941.

11 Ibid.

Newspaper articles, legal acts about the NDH's internal organisation, Ustaša emblems, military equipment and official currency were used to depict that process and adherently the incorporation of Bosnia and Herzegovina into the new state. It also presented the legal acts and legislation of the new authorities against the Jewish and Serb populations. This served as an introductory part for the next topic, which dealt with the consequences of said processes.

The following topic, "The Terror of the Occupation and the Ustasha", emphasised the core processes leading to the exclusion and extermination of all those who seemingly threatened the Ustasha society. The introductory text stated: "The crime of genocide as well as the methods of racial and national discrimination, which were in practice by Nazi Germany already, were implemented by the Germans and the Italians in Bosnia and Herzegovina, in a somewhat different shape, using the Ustasha primarily as a tool for their policy of 'divide and conquer'."¹² Another text highlighted the tragedy that "befell our people bringing them national slavery, hunger, and havoc", before explicitly explaining that: "Axis occupying authorities rage in their wild and predatory pursuit of the people of Yugoslavia [...] people are being killed wherever you go."¹³

These exhibition texts specifically emphasised the severity of the ongoing events and processes following the capitulation and the establishment of "occupying authorities". This aligns with the general idea of what these texts had to achieve. Indeed, a document labelled "The List of Examined and Cross-checked Exhibition Texts", concerning the topic of concentration camps and the persecution of Jews, Serbs and Roma population, had a footnote pointing out that "this topic needs to be more emphasised so that the visitors could 'get a feel' and 'experience' it, especially the younger generations".¹⁴

When depicting the Ustasha regime's crimes and its persecution of Jews, Serbs and the Roma population, the victims were sometimes given national or religious affiliations and sometimes not. Even though some texts in this

12 HMBiH, *Thematic plan*, Topic 16.

13 Ibid.

14 HMBiH – Documentation Center, *The list of examined and double-checked exhibition texts*, no author, no date, Topic 16. This document proved important for my research because it offered the possibility of comparing it with the document mentioned in the introductory part of the article, containing the final version of the exhibition texts. Through that comparison, I could identify some of the changes made to the exhibition, which will be discussed later in the text.

part refer to the Ustasha regime's actions against the "Serb population" and "Jews" on its territory, most of the exhibition texts refer to the victims as "people", "women, children and elderly" or as "camp inmates".¹⁵ However, a couple of exhibition texts mention detained "communists" and the "captured participants of NOB", which is not a national affiliation, but still a clear distinction compared to other victims portrayed in the exhibition.¹⁶ The differences in dealing with national/political affiliations were part of a strategy to strengthen certain narratives, mainly the gravity of the consequences of Ustasha collaboration with the occupation. On one side, national affiliation was not emphasised in trying to achieve social cohesion and put internal national conflicts from wartime aside.¹⁷ On the other side, emphasising the political affiliation of said victims was probably done to portray the KPJ as being always with the people undergoing the same hardships as all others.

Ultimately, the exhibition narrative underlines a couple of core perspectives about the Ustasha and the NDH. First of all, they were "quislings" and "servants of the occupiers". Their role as collaborators was the exhibition's focal point, and the exhibition showcased that through numerous exhibits. This led to the other perspective, which was labelling the Ustasha as "a tool" in the hands of Germans and Italians, who used them to pursue their genocidal policies. Such a perspective was based on a vivid depiction of the crimes they committed throughout the war.

The Chetniks: A stab in the back

Beyond the Germans and the Ustasha, the Chetniks are another warring side to be examined in this chapter, focusing on how the exhibition presented them and their actions during World War II. After Yugoslavia's capitulation and the dissolution of the Yugoslav army, a group of officers and soldiers refused to follow the order to surrender to the Germans. This group, led by Draža Mihajlović, eventually moved to Ravna Gora in Serbia, where more officers and soldiers joined. They organised themselves as a

15 Even when depicting the outline of the persecution of Jews across Europe, it was stated that "The Auschwitz concentration camp was the place where around four million people from all over Europe were killed in the most brutal of ways." – HMBiH, *Exhibition texts*, Topic 16.

16 Ibid.

17 Cf. Jagdhuhn, *Metamuseums*, 3.

resistance movement against the occupation, but eventually started collaborating.¹⁸ Under the official name of the Yugoslav Army in the Fatherland, their role during the war became one of the most contested issues regarding memorialising “difficult heritage” after the war, due to their movement going from resistance movement to collaboration.¹⁹

The standalone portion of the exhibition titled “The Chetnik Betrayal” set the tone for the narrative in which the Chetniks were portrayed. The exhibition’s introductory text stated: “The collaboration between the Chetniks, the occupiers and the Ustasha was made official in the spring of 1942, by a series of treaties for joint fight against the partisans.” Furthermore, “the Chetniks managed to reconstruct the former government institutions in Herzegovina with the help of Italians and in Eastern Bosnia with the help of Germans”. Introducing the topic in this way set a firm narrative focused on the Chetniks’ collaboration and betrayal of the people of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Another text underlined this by stating that “when the German fascist occupation, together with the hordes of Pavelić, started an offensive against the liberated territory in eastern Bosnia, all Chetnik ‘leaders’ (*vođe*) and ‘dukes’ (*vojvode*) ran away from the enemy, but not before ordering their units to let the enemy go by without any fighting”.²⁰

As with the Ustasha, after emphasising the Chetniks’ collaboration with the occupiers, the narrative focused on the mass crimes they committed in 1942, which were vividly depicted. Despite that similarity, the presentation of the victims was differentiated by giving them national/religious affiliations, with quotes such as: “A knife that the Chetniks used in committing mass murder against the Muslim population of Foča and Goražde.” The texts specifically mention the “Muslim population”, but constructs like “women, children and elderly” were present as well. Similarly to Ustasha, the persecution and murders of Partisans and their officers were presented as a separate subtopic in the context of Chetnik crimes.

It was a recurring approach to give the victims national, religious or political affiliation only to strengthen the narrative about the Ustasha and Chetniks as collaborators and traitors, as well as the severity of their actions. The portrayal of Partisan commanders killed by the Chetniks provides another

18 For more information, see: Enver Redžić, *Bosnia and Herzegovina in the Second World War*, trans. Aida Vidan (New York: Frank Cass, 2005), 215-216.

19 Jagdhuhn, *Metamuseums*, 3.

20 HMBiH, *Exhibition texts*, Topic 23.

example: “Most treacherously and brutally, the Chetniks killed Dr. Mladen Stojanović, the chief of staff for the People’s Liberation Army. The latest traitors of Serb people – the Chetniks, killed Mladen who was among the first to lead the Serb people to fight back when it was faced with the danger of being exterminated by the Ustashes.”²¹ Even though national affiliations were usually not given to the Partisans, this exhibition text did quite the opposite. With the KPJ being portrayed as a force that rallied all the patriotic forces, different nationalities and religions under the idea of “brotherhood and unity”, a Partisan officer was portrayed as leading “Serb people in the face of imminent danger” and finally being heinously killed by the traitors – the Chetniks. In portraying the Chetniks’ crimes, national affiliation, along with numerous artefacts such as weapons, uniforms and emblems,²² was used to strengthen the narrative about the heinous nature of their betrayal and being on the fascist side from the beginning. This corresponds with the presentation of Chetniks in Yugoslavia in general. They were seen by the state solely as “collaborators” which ultimately led to a clear-cut distinction between “the people” and “others”/“them” (traitors/collaborators).²³

The Chetniks being presented in the exhibition for the first time in the context of 1942 and their official collaboration raises questions about their presence and actions in the previous period, in 1941. The exhibition dedicated almost no attention to this, only mentioning Chetniks a couple of times in the context of the attack on the “Republic of Užice”.²⁴ More importantly, KPJ leadership’s several attempts to establish a joint front with the Chetniks were not mentioned at all. Those attempts are a well-established fact in contemporary historiography, and were sometimes mentioned in the literature of the late 1950s and 1960s. A book titled *Overview of the History of the People’s Liberation Struggle*, published in 1963, stated: “It is known that the Communist Party led by comrade Tito undertook all possible actions in an attempt to dissuade Mihajlović from committing treason and prevent fratricidal war.”²⁵

21 Ibid.

22 Those enemy objects were of utmost importance, as they were not just proof of the crimes perpetrated, but also evidence for the narrative about the Chetniks’ treacherous nature. Jagdhuhn, *Metamuseums*, 18-19.

23 Ibid., 3.

24 The Republic of Užice (*Užička republika*) was a territory in western Serbia liberated and controlled by the Partisan movement in autumn 1941. It was the first liberated territory in World War II in Europe until it was conquered again by German troops in November 1941.

25 Tomo Čubelić and Milovan Milostić, *Pregled historije NOB* (Zagreb: Matica Hrvatska, 1963), 82-83.

When considering the narratives about the Ustasha and the Chetniks, one might ask why there was no real differentiation in how these collaborators were presented, given that one of them had a state and that the other acted on behalf of the exiled Yugoslav government. Interestingly, the mere fact that, with the NDH, there was a state and a system that facilitated the persecution of Jews, Serbs and Roma was never emphasised as such. The fact that the NDH's genocidal policies against Serbs were not demanded by Nazi Germany, but rather were initiated and realised by the Ustasha was not mentioned. As they were considered a tool, the Ustasha were denied their own agency. The exhibition narrative was completely based on presenting the one thing that Ustasha and Chetniks had in common: collaboration. Unlike the NDH, whose existence was shown but never emphasised, the question of Chetnik activities and their orientation at the beginning of the uprising was not shown at all. The explanation for this is certainly that the Chetnik activities, in the beginning, could be tied to the KPJ to a certain degree, but the narrative about the KPJ in the exhibition allowed for no such thing, as will be presented in the following parts of the article.

The Communist Party: The red star of resistance

With the presentation of the occupying forces and their collaborators at the beginning, the most important part of the exhibition revolved around the People's Liberation Movement (*Narodnooslobodilački pokret* – NOP), led by the KPJ. Out of the 29 topics covering the World War II period, only three were dedicated to presenting forces opposed to the KPJ. The remaining topics focused entirely on the NOP from the beginning of the uprising in Bosnia and Herzegovina on 27 July 1941, led by the KPJ's watchful eye. To analyse them, I have regrouped these topics around three general themes, which can be seen as complementary and as central elements for constructing the underlying narrative: the first is the uprising of 1941, the military operations during the war the second, and the revolutionary process with the political creation of socialist Yugoslavia being the final one.

The opening topic introduces the KPJ and is titled: "The Uprising of the People of Bosnia and Herzegovina." The narrative presented focuses on the party's role as the main, and more importantly, the only driving force behind the July 1941 uprising. This again reflects the general historiography of that



Fig. 2: The building of the Museum of the Revolution. The permanent exhibition was opened in the “Cube” in 1966. (HMBiH, Photo Archive)²⁶

time.²⁷ The KPJ’s role was emphasised in the introductory text: “The Communist Party of Yugoslavia, even though persecuted over the last 20 years, was always on the forefront of fighting for the rights of the oppressed and nationally enslaved... In spite of terror, arrests, and murders, the Party will organise the fight against the occupier and its collaborators even more decisively and persistently.”²⁸ The invasion of the Soviet Union was presented as another motivation for the uprising, although not prominently. It was mentioned within one exhibition text in the following way: “Into battle because the time has come to throw off the occupying fascist yoke! Into battle, because it is our debt to the Soviet people who are fighting for our freedom! Into battle, the last one to destroy the fascist infection!”²⁹

The KPJ’s leading role continued to be emphasised in the following topics, one of which was titled “The Creation of a People’s Government”. It illustrated the process of creating governing bodies, People’s Liberation

26 Fig. 2 and Fig. 3, taken by Džemal Hadžimuratović, were obtained from Esad Hadžihasanović, who has been the museum’s photographer since the 1970s.

27 See, for example: “That historical task could have been achieved by the working class and its political organisation – KPJ” because it was the only one that had the trust of the people. Konstantin Bastaić et al., *Narodi Jugoslavije u borbi za slobodu* (Zagreb: Znanje, 1959), 323; Čubelić and Milošević, *Pregled historije NOB*, 61.

28 HMBiH, *Thematic plan*, Topic 17.

29 HMBiH, *Exhibition texts*, Topic 17.

Councils (*Narodnooslobodilački odbori* – NOO), which were tasked with organising and facilitating the new political system on territory liberated by the Partisans. Those governing bodies were portrayed as mediums through which the people were able to demonstrate their political will. Following the same matrix as in the previous topic, it was pointed out that those governing bodies were ultimately led and controlled by the KPJ, which was not only leading the uprising but also creating the foundation of the new people's political system and state.³⁰ Another example of this narrative appears in the topic “The Military Units of the People's Liberation Movement in Bosnia and Herzegovina,” where one text stated: “That's why the Communist Party of Yugoslavia in Bosnia and Herzegovina, in order to mobilise the people into battle against the occupiers and domestic traitors, had to constantly and unwaveringly promote and emphasise the idea of brotherhood and unity.”³¹

Portraying the KPJ as the only organisation capable of mobilising the people to resist begs the question of whether there was any other body capable of organising the resistance. The exhibition offers two interesting examples regarding that. Before the July 1941 uprising in the topic “Terror of the Occupiers and Ustasha”, there was a subtopic titled “Resistance of the People of Eastern Herzegovina Against Ustasha Crimes”, in which the events of June 1941 were mentioned several times. One such event was an attack on an Ustasha patrol near Nevesinje conducted by “the people of eastern Herzegovina”. This subtopic's title is one of the rare places where the term “resistance” (*otpor*) was used, while the dominant terms in the exhibition text were “uprising” (*ustanak*) or “struggle” (*borba*), raising question of why those actions were not also labelled as such. The argument could be that the KPJ was the one that started the uprising, while the events mentioned in this subtopic were much more spontaneous and, more importantly, not led by the KPJ. The narrative saw only the KPJ as capable of an organised and massive uprising with clear political goals, in contrast to unorganised “resistance”, which was more seen as a reactive rather than proactive response. Related to organised resistance, it was also important to ignore the Chetniks and their initial stance in the first period of the war.

Interestingly, there was also a proposal to present the Chetniks as part of the uprising as well. The proposed exhibition text stated: “In order to

30 HMBiH, *Thematic plan*, Topic 18.

31 *Ibid.*, Topic 19.

preserve the unity of insurgent ranks (*ustaničkih redova*) and to mobilise all patriotic forces (*patriotske snage*) in a fight against the occupiers, at the initiative of chief headquarters of NOP units of Bosnia and Herzegovina, a treaty of cooperation was signed on 1 October 1941, in Drinjača with the Chetnik high command for Bosnia and Herzegovina. The Chetniks violated the agreement very soon.”³² This text was ultimately not chosen. We can assume that this happened for two reasons. First, the Chetniks were categorised here as part of the “patriotic forces” willing to fight against the occupation, which was a contradiction to the narrative of Chetniks being collaborators from the beginning.³³ Second, this exhibition text presented the meetings between KPJ leadership and the Chetnik high command to form some sort of cooperation against the occupiers. This would have bridged the gap in the uprising from 1941 until 1942, in terms of explaining the positions of the Partisans and KPJ on one side and the Chetniks on the other. Consequently, this exhibition text proposal was discarded, as noted in the document “Final redaction”.³⁴

Through the woods and hills

The uprising was the first important theme in the exhibition narrative about the KPJ and the Partisans. The second was military operations, or so-called “offensives”,³⁵ undertaken by the Germans and their collaborators against the NOP. Since the first offensive against the “Republic of Užice” in 1941 occurred outside of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the exhibition text about the offensives started with the second offensive, better known as the “Igman March” (also the title of the topic). The Igman March was a daring undertaking by the Partisans in January of 1942 in which they managed to escape encirclement over Igman mountain near Sarajevo. The introductory text stated: “To end the uprising and to protect their military and economic

32 HMBiH, *Thematic plan*, Topic 19.

33 See also Jagdhuhn, *Metamuseums*, 19. Jagdhuhn writes more generally about Yugoslavia: “Any proof of resistance on the part of the Yugoslav Army in the Fatherland in the early years of the war was not placed on the priority list for historical documentation.”

34 Underneath the mentioned exhibition text is a handwritten note reading “To be discarded” (*Otpada*) – HMBiH, *Exhibition texts*, Topic 19.

35 “The seven offensives” is a term in Yugoslav historiography, referring to the seven military operations that the Germans undertook to destroy the NOP between 1941 and 1944. Most of them took place on the territory of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

interests, the Germans, with the help of Italians and the Ustasha, undertook an offensive against the Partisans in eastern Bosnia in January 1942. Strong enemy forces, thanks to the betrayal of Chetnik forces, managed to break through into the Partisan-controlled territory. The Partisans were forced to retreat and head towards Foča, performing one of the most glorious marches, known as the Igman March.”³⁶

After the Igman March, the exhibition underlined the significance of the time that the KPJ and the Partisans spent in the town of Foča in eastern Bosnia in 1942. This period became known as the “Foča period”. This topic centred on the KPJ’s efforts to mobilise and establish new brigades, particularly in furthering the development of the “people’s government”. The third offensive against the Partisans in eastern Bosnia in spring 1942 was presented as a direct consequence of the successes achieved by the KPJ and the NOB during their time in Foča. Partisans undertook another march from eastern Bosnia to northwestern parts of Bosnia. Along the way, “Partisans destroyed numerous enemy units and managed to create a newly liberated territory in Bosnian Krajina.”³⁷

This newly liberated territory with a Partisan state was presented as a crucial step in the efforts made both on the battlefield and in establishing a new political system facilitating the NOP’s growth. Within this territory and theme, special attention was given to the events in the mountainous area of Kozara. These were presented as a standalone topic entitled “Kozara”: “The successes of the partisan units and versatile work of the party organisations and governing bodies made Kozara into a real partisan fortress – the forge of brotherhood and unity.” Once more, their successes forced the Germans to react, only this time, their aim was not only to end the uprising but to also “punish the people of Kozara for its unwavering support and participation in the NOB”. The consequences of the attack for the civilian population were summarised as follows: “Only 15-20 thousand people managed to break through the encirclement on Kozara, while around 60 thousand people were taken into numerous concentration camps.”³⁸

The presentation of the following two “enemy offensives” put them in clear continuity with the previous ones, showing them to be a direct consequence of the NOP’s successes in 1942. The topic titled “From River Una

36 HMBiH, *Thematic Plan*, Topic 22.

37 *Ibid.*, Topic 25.

38 HMBiH, *Thematic Plan*, Topic 27.



Fig. 3: A segment of the NOB section within the permanent exhibition.
(HMBiH, Photo Archive)

to River Drina”, which showcased the fourth offensive, pointed out that the People’s Liberation Army of Yugoslavia “threatened the existence” of the Ustasha regime.³⁹ The offensive was presented as an important victory for the Partisans in that they managed to save the wounded, destroy the majority of the Chetnik forces, who “never managed to recover”, and go to Herzegovina.⁴⁰ Throughout the topic, a huge emphasis was put on presenting the severity of the situation for the Partisan hospital and the wounded, following the narrative of the Yugoslav historiography about the “Battle at the Neretva River” or “The Battle for the Wounded”.⁴¹

39 HMBiH, *Thematic plan*, Topic 31.

40 Ibid.

41 See, for example: Ljubo Mihić, *Bitka za ranjenike na Neretvi* (Jablanica: Skupština opštine Prozor i Skupština opštine Jablanica, 1978), 7.

“After a short break, which was much needed for the enemy to regroup their forces, the Germans continued to pursue their intentions of destroying the People’s Liberation Army and the KPJ.” This sentence introduced the topic “Battle of Sutjeska”, which took place in 1943. It focused on depicting the disparity in numbers and the severity of the battle: “During this offensive, the main partisan force lost more than 8.000 fighters.” To put even more emphasis on the brutality of the battle, there was a dedicated subtopic titled “Mass Heroism During the Most Difficult Times”.⁴² It had a graphic presentation of the geography of the terrain on which the battle happened, the life conditions of the fighters and the wounded, and a photo of wounded Tito on Sutjeska.

The exhibition’s narrative about these two offensives centred on presenting their importance for the NOB and the future of Yugoslavia. Both were portrayed as make-or-break events for the Partisan movement, with them either erupting into an unprecedented force of resistance or ending up destroyed by the Germans. With victories achieved in both of the offensives (in the sense that the Germans did not achieve their goal), the Partisans grew to an unprecedented strength, as presented in the topic “The Flaring up of People’s Liberation Movement in Bosnia and Herzegovina”. The Partisans’ successes and its consequences were presented in the following way: “In the second half of 1943, the People’s Liberation Movement grew into the leading military and political power in the country. The idea of brotherhood and unity was manifested on a large scale.”⁴³

After the glorious victories at the Neretva River and on Sutjeska, the final two offensives against the NOP in 1944 were portrayed as a last-ditch German effort to quell the uprising.⁴⁴ The introductory text for the topic “Airborne Assault on Drvar” showcased this: “On Tito’s birthday, the first airborne assault against the Partisans was undertaken. Around 800 fascist criminals were supposed to be rehabilitated by assassinating Marshall Tito. The assault failed and remained only as an act of desperation.” The crimes perpetrated against the civilian population during those offensives were particularly emphasised; the Germans were said to have “executed every living person they managed to capture including women, children, and war prisoners.”⁴⁵

42 HMBiH, *Thematic plan*, Topic 32.

43 Ibid.

44 HMBiH, *Thematic plan*, Topic 36 – 37.

45 Ibid.

After the “enemy offensives”, the crescendo of the military operations was the liberation of the country. These were represented in a standalone topic titled “Liberation of Capital Cities of Bosnia and Herzegovina”. The liberation of Mostar was mentioned in this topic (“after four years of heroic fighting, the people of Mostar welcomed the day of freedom on 14 February 1945”⁴⁶), as was the liberation of Sarajevo on 6 April 1945. It was only in the example of Sarajevo that the resistance activities in occupied cities were mentioned and presented to a certain degree. Interestingly, the 1964 plan of the exhibition barely mentioned the resistance in occupied cities. However, the number of exhibits eventually increased. In the 1964 plan, only two photos and a schematic display of KPJ activities in Sarajevo were used for the resistance movement in Sarajevo. However, based on exhibition texts from 1965, a lot more space was allocated to it with the addition of items belonging to Vladimir “Valter” Perić.⁴⁷

Forging of the New Yugoslavia

The exhibition’s dominant theme was the NOB’s military aspect, shown through standalone topics related to the offensives. The third important general theme within the exhibition narrative about the KPJ and the Partisans was the process of creating the foundations of future Yugoslavia. That revolutionary process revolved around creating governing bodies that were primarily in charge of governing the liberated territories and facilitating the NOP’s further growth as well as decisive Partisan meetings for creating the future Yugoslavia and Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Among the latter, the first mentioned event was “The first session of AVNOJ” in Bihać in 1942, focusing on the creation of the Anti-Fascist Council for the People’s Liberation of Yugoslavia (*Antifašističko vijeće narodnog oslobođenja Jugoslavije* – AVNOJ). This newly-formed political body had a set number of tasks revolving around “the political mobilisation of people and governing the work of NOO”.⁴⁸ “The second session of AVNOJ” held in Jajce in 1943 was granted much more space and emphasis, given

46 HMBiH, *Thematic plan*, Topic 41.

47 Vladimir “Valter” Perić came to Sarajevo in 1943 with the task of rebuilding the underground KPJ and its resistance activities in the city. He was killed on the day Sarajevo was liberated, 6 April 1945, and was proclaimed People’s Hero in socialist Yugoslavia in 1953.

48 HMBiH, *Thematic plan*, Topic 30.

its significance for the NOB. It depicted AVNOJ's evolution into "the supreme legislative and executive governing body". This session marked the beginning of the rebirth of Yugoslavia as a democratic and federative state, with Bosnia and Herzegovina being a part of it as a federal unit. Another key aspect of the narrative was the international dimension of these events and their reception among the Allied powers. That was clearly stated in the introductory text for the second session: "The decisions made during the second session of AVNOJ had a strong echo, both domestically and internationally. They were met with approval and delight among Allied Powers and had resulted in a change of attitude of said powers towards the Yugoslav Government in exile."⁴⁹

Besides the AVNOJ sessions' importance for the entire Yugoslavia, the exhibition emphasised the Partisan movement's importance for Bosnia and Herzegovina through topics about the creation and evolution of ZAVNOBIH as the "high representative and legislative body" for Bosnia and Herzegovina. In the first topic, titled "The first session of ZAVNOBIH", held in Mrkonjić Grad in 1943, one of the texts stated: "The people of Bosnia and Herzegovina, through their struggle which impressed the whole world, had built their truly democratic government."⁵⁰ Following the second session of AVNOJ's decision, the second ZAVNOBIH session was held in 1944 in Sanski Most. During this session, ZAVNOBIH became the "supreme legislative and representative state governing body" and the NOOs became "the governing bodies" as the top-down instance of ZAVNOBIH.⁵¹ "The third session of ZAVNOBIH" was held in Sarajevo and presented the final stage of the process, which was the creation of Bosnia and Herzegovina's government in 1945. The revolutionary governing bodies' focus shifted from functioning in wartime conditions to preparing for the "rebuilding of the country". Along that process, "the working methods of the Party were to be adjusted to the new context; the leading role of the Party in that process had to be ensured" because that was the guarantee for "not just preserving the heritage of the People's Liberation War, but also for the socialist transformation of Bosnia and Herzegovina."⁵²

49 Ibid. Topic 35.

50 HMBiH, *Exhibition texts*, Topic 34.

51 HMBiH, *Thematic plan*, Topic 38.

52 Ibid. Topic 42.

What did others say about the exhibition plans?

As mentioned in the introduction, work on the exhibition started nearly a decade before it was finally presented to the public. An important step in that process was getting external feedback from renowned names in the fields of history, museology and political sciences. In the Documentation Centre of the History Museum of Bosnia and Herzegovina, besides the plans and the exhibition texts, there is a folder with reviews and comments about the thematic plan for the permanent exhibition.⁵³ It contains six reviews made by external associates between 1959 and 1964, among them Idriz Čejvan⁵⁴ and Hamdija Čemerlić.⁵⁵ Beyond the two review documents which have the names of Čejvan and Čemerlić, the others only have the handwritten signatures by the authors, which we could not identify at this stage. I will present some important points of these reviews, also addressing the question of to what extent those suggestions have been implemented in the exhibition itself, which can often not be clearly determined.

From Čemerlić's viewpoint in 1964, the way the exhibition team dealt with the task's complexity, making such an elaborate plan without leaving out some important moment or event, should receive "every praise". He pointed out that the exhibition needed even more emphasis on the terror of the Ustasha and the persecution of Jews, Serbs and the Roma population so that "the visitors and especially younger generations" understood the gravity of such events. Furthermore, Čemerlić put a lot of emphasis on different ways of resistance in 1941, suggesting that "The Muslim Resolutions"⁵⁶ should find their place in the exhibition. He stated that they showcased the Muslim population's opposition or resistance against the terror

53 HMBiH – Documentation Center, *Reviews and comments about the thematic plan for the permanent exhibition, 1959 – 1964*.

54 Idriz Čejvan, a Partisan and political commissar during the war, was a ranking general in the Yugoslav People's Army and the head of the Yugoslav People's Army Military Museum.

55 The academician Hamdija Čemerlić (1905-1990) was a law professor, and rector of the University of Sarajevo and had been a participant of ZAVNOBiH and AVNOJ.

56 The Muslim Resolutions refer to a series of declarations by Bosnian Muslim elites in Sarajevo and other towns, addressed to Ustasha authorities, condemning the violence of the Ustasha and aiming to provide legal protection for all citizens of NDH. The first declaration was issued by El-Hidaje, an association of ulama from Bosnia and Herzegovina on 14 August 1941, followed by several more resolutions, most notably the Resolution of Sarajevo in October 1941. For more information see Hikmet Karčić, Ferid Dautović and Ermin Sinanović eds., *The Muslim Resolutions: Bosniak Responses to World War Two Atrocities in Bosnia and Herzegovina* (Sarajevo: Center for Islam in the Contemporary World, 2021).

and persecution done by the Ustasha, playing a big role in guiding those who were unaware of what was going on among the Muslim population. Regarding that, he also suggested that the exhibition should portray different political parties that were among the ruling ones before the war and “how they did nothing when the fateful moment came”.⁵⁷ The final version of the exhibition showed that Čemerlić’s suggestions were not accepted or incorporated into the exhibition since neither “The Muslim Resolutions” nor the political parties were mentioned in it.

One common critique among the reviews was that the exhibition plan focused too much on military aspects and, as a consequence, did not adequately represent the revolution’s social and political aspects. The process of establishing life after the liberation of a certain territory did not receive proper space in the exhibition. In other words, by strictly following the chronology of the events, certain processes were presented with big gaps in between rather than having one dedicated topic for them. Moreover, some of the reviews stated that the current representation did not portray the revolution as a “comprehensive process”.⁵⁸ One example of that could be the process of creating a people’s government. This process started with the topic “The Creation of a People’s Government”, but due to the chronology of events, the NOOs popped up again only after five other topics. The final version of the exhibition, based on my analysis, did not incorporate these suggestions.

One of the suggestions that seems to have been accepted was emphasising the KPJ’s “leading role”, although this was probably the exhibition designers’ intention from the beginning. This suggestion was part of one of the reviews that has only a handwritten signature and where it was not possible to identify the author: “It is a historical fact that the KPJ organised the uprising against the occupiers in our country. Considering that the literature has already established the leading role of the Party as the main organiser and the leader of the uprising, it needs to be emphasised even more.” This review is dated 1959, so the author referenced some other version of the plan (which we could not find in the archives of the Museum) because the plan from 1964 greatly emphasised the KPJ’s role and was one of the main keynotes in the exhibition narrative.

57 HMBiH – Documentation Center, *Reviews and comments*, Hamdija Čemerlić.

58 HMBiH, *Reviews and comments*, 1959; 1964.

Conclusion

The permanent exhibition of the Museum of the Revolution provided its visitors with a broad overview of the NOB in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Even though the museum aimed to portray the revolution in conjunction with social and historical processes, its heavy focus on the military aspect underlined the party-centric view of World War II and the revolution in general. Taking into consideration the museum's role and aim of being a medium for promoting the values and legacy of the NOB, the exhibition embodied official KPJ views about the NOB and warring sides and participated in its articulation and dissemination. The example of the Museum of the Revolution and its permanent exhibition can be perceived in the context of the efforts made by the state to legitimise its right to be at the helm of the new Yugoslavia after the war, as well as in their efforts to create collective memory and identity.

Presenting a clear division between “the people” and “them” – in this case, the people led by the KPJ on the one side and the Germans and their collaborators on the other – and the KPJ's untouchable role in mobilising the uprising are clear examples of that.⁵⁹ The KPJ's role and contribution were mentioned in every exhibition topic, strengthening the narrative about the KPJ being the only force fighting against the occupation. Importantly, the exhibition never really focused on distinguishing between the collaborating sides, most notably the Ustasha and the Chetniks, even though some examples presented in the article and the historiography of the time noted those differences. Anything that could have blurred that division was ultimately discarded by the exhibition team. One of the reasons for this may lie in the state's postwar efforts to establish and affirm Yugoslav identity, whose people would be tied not just by the same blood but also through “spilt” blood.⁶⁰ The last exhibition topic, titled “The Contribution of People of Bosnia and Herzegovina”, is a good example of that, stating: “The people of Bosnia and Herzegovina were among the first to join the fight against fascism, not to desperately defend their bare lives, but to persistently and wholeheartedly fight against the occupation for a better and brighter future.”⁶¹

59 This reflects the general presentation of World War II in socialist Yugoslavia, which focused on the clear-cut division between those who “resisted” and those who “collaborated”. Gordana Đerić, “Označeno i neoznačeno u narativima društvenog pamćenja: jugoslovenski slučaji”, in *The Culture of Memory: 1945*, eds. Sulejman Bosto and Tihomir Cipek (Zagreb: Disput, 2009), 87.

60 Đerić, “Označeno i neoznačeno”, 88; Jagdhuhn, *Metamuseums*, 2.

61 HMBiH, *Thematic plan*, Topic 44.

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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