



**HAL**  
open science

## Exhibiting Yugoslavia

Milica Popovic

► **To cite this version:**

Milica Popovic. Exhibiting Yugoslavia. Družboslovne razprave, 2016, XXXII (81), pp.7 - 24. hal-03612190

**HAL Id: hal-03612190**

**<https://hal-sciencespo.archives-ouvertes.fr/hal-03612190>**

Submitted on 17 Mar 2022

**HAL** is a multi-disciplinary open access archive for the deposit and dissemination of scientific research documents, whether they are published or not. The documents may come from teaching and research institutions in France or abroad, or from public or private research centers.

L'archive ouverte pluridisciplinaire **HAL**, est destinée au dépôt et à la diffusion de documents scientifiques de niveau recherche, publiés ou non, émanant des établissements d'enseignement et de recherche français ou étrangers, des laboratoires publics ou privés.

Milica Popović

## EXHIBITING YUGOSLAVIA

### ABSTRACT

*By using memory theory, critical discourse and multimodal analysis, the article examines the narratives of the exhibition "Yugoslavia: From the Beginning to the End" held at the Museum of Yugoslav History in Belgrade in order to identify and analyze the Museum's discourse in the post-Yugoslav transitional context of the Republic of Serbia. The article tries to demystify the hidden text on Yugoslavia in the exhibition's catalog and on the Museum's website. Within the complex context of public narratives on Yugoslav history, and of the position of the Museum as a public institution, the exhibition shows strong convergence with revisionist hegemonic narratives, whilst simultaneously creating a dialogue with counter-memory and nostalgic narratives and thus opening its space up for further conversations on the Yugoslav collective memory.*

**KEYWORDS:** Museum of Yugoslav History, post-Yugoslav narratives, exhibition discourses, collective memory, representations of the past

## Razstavljanje Jugoslavije

### IZVLEČEK

*V pričujočem prispevku s pomočjo teoretskega pojmovanja spomina, kritične analize diskurza in multimodalne analize analiziramo narativne elemente razstave »Jugoslavija: od začetka do konca«, ki je bila postavljena v beograjskem Muzeju jugoslovanske zgodovine, pri čemer identificiramo in analiziramo muzejske diskurze v postjugoslovanski tranzicijski Srbiji. Prispevek skuša demistificirati implicitne pomene tekstov: kataloga razstave in muzejske spletne strani. Znotraj kompleksnega okvira javnih naracij o jugoslovanski zgodovini in pozicije muzeja kot javne institucije omenjena razstava kaže na visoko stopnjo revizionistične hegemonске naracije, ki obenem vrši dialog s kontraspominom in reproducira nostalgicne naracije, tako pa odpira prostor za nadaljnje dialoge o jugoslovanskem kolektivnem spominu.*

**KLJUČNE BESEDE:** Muzej jugoslovanske zgodovine, postjugoslovanske naracije, muzejski diskurz, kolektivni spomin, reprezentacija preteklosti

## 1 Introduction

Using memory theory, critical discourse analysis and multimodal analysis, the article aims to analyze the representation of Yugoslavia at the exhibition *Yugoslavia: From the Beginning to the End* (2012/2013) (henceforth exhibition), held at the Museum of Yugoslav History in Belgrade (henceforth Museum).

The exhibition was curated by a number of experts from different ex-Yugoslav states and it aimed to create a basis for a permanent exhibition of the Museum, which does not currently exist. As noted in the exhibition's subtitle, it sought to represent "the history of one of the most interesting and most controversial state experiments of the 20th century." It claimed multiperspectivity<sup>1</sup> as one of its main features and emphasized that its narrative is just "one of the ways in which the story can be told"<sup>2</sup>. In this article, I want to give an insight into the process of meaning-making within the exhibition and try to shed light on (some of) its hidden text(s) on Yugoslavia.

After introducing the concept of memory theory and critical discourse analysis, this article briefly looks at the Museum's historical development, as the Museum is herein considered as an interactive actor, the producer of the discourse. The Museum's position within the public narratives of Serbia's political elites is contextualized, as is the relationship of the elites with the Museum itself. In the second half of the paper, after briefly presenting *the Museum's exhibitions in the last decade, the article introduces a specific analysis of the web presentation of the exhibition Yugoslavia: From the Beginning to the End (2012/2013) and its electronic catalog.*

The article aims to identify the Museum's discourse(s) within one specific exhibition and to examine how these discourses have contributed to the creation of narratives on Yugoslavia in post-Yugoslav times (1991-2016). The main research questions are: Are the Museum's discourses aligned with the official public narratives on Yugoslavia or do they stand in opposition to them? What kind of collective memory, understood through Maurice Halbwachs's concept of collective memory (Halbwachs 1968), is being created through the dialogue of the public narratives and the narratives of Museum's curators and associates who are creating the exhibition(s)?

The context in which the Museum today operates is multifaceted. Since the dissolution of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia in the 1990s, Yugoslavia was either ignored in Serbia's public discourse or represented as the worst period in its history – in what Boris Buden calls and understands as the "post-communist discourse" (Buden 2012). Revisionist state narratives in Serbia during the rule of Slobodan Milošević at first claimed their pro-Yugoslav orientation (Rupnik 2004). Since 2000, they have, however, strongly distanced themselves from the socialist past. Erasing Yugoslav identity became a condition for the creation of (new) national identities and a way of legitimizing the wars of the nineties and

---

1. Multiperspectivity is here understood as a concept in historiography meaning incorporation of different sources that reflect different views on a historical event; a multiplicity of historical narratives.

2. Quotations and references to the work of the Museum of History of Yugoslavia, if not otherwise noted in the text, have been used from the Museum's official website: [www.mij.rs](http://www.mij.rs). Where references did not exist in English, they have been translated by the paper's author.

the dissolution of the country (Levi 2009). Any positive public discourses relating to the ex-socialist state of Yugoslavia were dubbed "nostalgic", and thus neutralized by being cast as banal or purely sentimental. As Dominic Boyer explains: "accusations and acceptations of nostalgia are never neutral" (Boyer 2010: 21). Accusations of Yugonostalgia aim at disowning political subjectivity from citizens who claim their Yugoslav identities in the post-Yugoslav context.

Nostalgia mostly manifests itself in private spaces, although it can be expressed in public spaces too. The Museum of Yugoslav History is one such public space: a space that is often criticized or praised for its representations of counter-memory (Mink 2007), as understood through the concept of reflective nostalgia (Boym 2001). Reflective nostalgia, Boym asserts, is "concerned with historical and individual time" and "individual and cultural memory" (Boym 2001: 49), while representing intimate spaces through cultural artifacts.

The article looks at the Museum's discourse through the eyes of "new art history in context-specific and socio-historical approaches" (Vogel 2013) identifying the institutional position of the Museum, its enunciative realities, and its discursive practices (Foucault 1984). The Museum's activities could be classified as "research-based exhibition(s) that revolve primarily around the production of discourse" (Bourriaud 2002: 18 in Vogel 2013). As Grek notes: "museum displays form a particularly interesting discursive genre, since, especially in most contemporary museums, they combine the visual (artifacts/ artworks) and the textual (text panels/video shows/ guides)" (Grek 2005: 219).

In the case of this exhibition, there have not been any specific analyses and scientific articles on this particular exhibition, and the discussions on the post-Yugoslav practices of the Museum mainly stay in the field of mass media. Or, they are only starting to interest the wider circles of researchers (i.e. Srđan Radović from the Institute of Ethnography of the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts has announced research on the topic at a conference in Pula in October 2015).

As a political scientist, the author's main approach remains within the field of (collective) memory theory and political sociology, while incorporating critical discourse analysis and using elements of multimodal analysis and staying highly interpretative. As Michael Meyer confirms, critical discourse analysis "must not be understood as a single method but rather as an approach, which constitutes itself at different levels" (Wodak and Meyer 2001: 14). As the analysis was conducted after the exhibition took place, it is based solely on the following materials: the Museum website, exhibition web pages, and the electronic version of the exhibition catalog. The exhibition catalog can be found in both printed and electronic versions – the electronic version is enhanced with the evaluation of the exhibition, which was not included in the printed one.<sup>3</sup> The electronic version of the catalog can be found on the Museum's website, under the section "Meet MYH." However, it is in a special section of the page "Work on the new permanent exhibition of the MYH," which is only in Serbian. This way, the catalog is not easily accessible to the visitors of the Museum's

3. Information obtained from Tatomir Toroman, Head of the Department for Documentation and Digitalization.

website and certainly not to the non-Serbian speaking visitors. The reach of the catalog, nevertheless, remains high – 502 copies in Serbian were sold along with 754 copies in English.<sup>4</sup> The exhibition itself had 12,427 visitors.<sup>5</sup> How is the Museum participating in the production of a post Yugoslav discourse in Serbia?

## 2 Museum Discursivity

As art museums create artistic discourses, we can say that historical museums create historical discourses (Fraser 2005). Or at least they participate in their creation. Exhibitions represent multimodal texts. They do so through a display of objects, images, and texts within which both the verbal and the visual play an important role (Kress and van Leeuwen 2006). Although the Museum has kept its hegemonic position (Gramsci 1971), it has become a place of dialogue where conflicting narratives meet. The Museum's hegemonic position emanates from its institutional position as a cultural institution of the state, created and led by the state and its political and intellectual elite. Looking at discourses on Yugoslavia in the context of cultural hegemony, we can say that the Museum creates history through official memory narratives, while it is citizens who create (emancipatory) nostalgia (Velikonja 2010; Petrović 2012) through counter-memory narratives. Museum discourses form a dialogue with nostalgic sentiments and create a relationship with revisionist public narratives.

As Foucault explains, official historical discourses are understood as truth:

*Each society has its regime of truth, its general politics of truth: that is, the types of discourse which it accepts and makes function as true; the mechanisms and instances which enable one to distinguish true and false statements, the means by which each is sanctioned; the techniques and procedures accorded value in the acquisition of truth; the status of those who are charged with saying what counts as true. (Foucault 1984:131)*

In post-Yugoslav Serbia, in the eyes of the public, the Museum of Yugoslav History is the bearer of truth regarding Yugoslavia. Public discourse considers that the narratives created by historians and curators stand as an objective vision of a common past.

Taking into account the limitations of length of a journal article, I have tried to preserve the accuracy of discourse analysis by contextualizing it and keeping my interpretation within memory theory. The article uses critical discourse analysis (CDA) borrowed from Norman Fairclough's understanding of CDA as a "normative and explanatory critique" (Fairclough 2012: 4) contributing to critical social analysis. Fairclough understands CDA as a trans-disciplinary critical social analysis (Fairclough 2012: 2). We also use a multimodal analysis founded on Kress and van Leeuwen's theoretical positions, within the theoretical framework of social semiotics (Kress and van Leeuwen 2006: 6), through analyzing the

4. Information obtained from Mirjana Slavković, curator and coordinator for international cooperation and projects.

5. Information obtained from Mirjana Slavković, curator and coordinator for international cooperation and projects.

photographs represented on the Museum's website, exhibition's web pages and in the catalog. Fairclough suggests that discourse analysis "is concerned with various 'semiotic modalities' of which language is only one (visual images and body language)" (Fairclough 2012: 3).

In this article, given the multimodality of an exhibition, the term 'discourse' is understood as "semiotic ways of construing aspects of the world (physical, social or mental) which can generally be identified with different positions or perspectives of different groups of social actors" (Fairclough 2012: 4). The level of discourse is an intermediate level, a mediating level between the text per se and its social context (Fairclough 2004: 37). The social context here is explained through the concepts of collective memory of Maurice Halbwachs (1968) and concepts of nostalgia and Yugonostalgia.

From Kress and Van Leeuwen's visual grammar, we can see that images are made up of elements that can be decomposed when we analyze their meaning. Concepts such as power, interaction, detachment, involvement, and so on are not meanings hidden in images. Rather, they are carriers of potential meaning, that is, they carry possible meanings which are then activated by the producers and viewers of images (Jewitt and Oyama 2001 in Liu 2013: 1260). As much as historical texts claim their objectivity, images and objects allow viewers to connect their individual memories with collective memory narratives and through this interaction, museums are producing dialogue spaces where the past is being renegotiated. Maurice Halbwachs claims that it is impossible to have a strictly individual memory (Halbwachs 1968). That way, the ritual of visiting a museum and/or an exhibition plays a significant role in our shaping of nostalgia as a productive and analytical category (Petrović 2012).

It is important to keep in mind that as much as an exhibition claims to represent "one of the ways in which the story can be told", the analysis presented here is equally just one of the ways in which the represented story can be read.

### **3 The Museum as an Interactive Participant in Discursive Production**

Looking at discursive practices, there are two types of participants: interactive and represented (Kress and van Leeuwen 2006: 48). Thus the Museum can be understood as an interactive participant, producing the discourse but within "the context of social institutions which, to different degrees and in different ways, regulate what may be 'said' with images, how it should be said, and how it should be interpreted" (Kress and van Leeuwen 2006: 114). Reality becomes defined by a social group and in this case it is through the institutional position of the Museum.

Looking into the history and the development of the Museum of Yugoslav History, as presented on the Museum website's "History" page, we learn that the Museum was founded in 1996 by a decree of the Government of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (already consisting of only Serbia and Montenegro). The decree states that the Museum would inherit the property of the abolished Josip Broz Tito Memorial Center, as well as the property of the Museum of the Peoples' Revolution of Yugoslavia. The latter included the

Old Museum, the House of Flowers, the May 25<sup>th</sup> Museum, and the historico-documentary and artistic materials of the Museum of Peoples' Revolution and the Memorial Center. Thus the Museum was to gather under one roof a number of different institutions and their archives. In 2003, the Museum became a national cultural institution – a Serbian one. In essence, the Museum was following the fate of Yugoslavia itself: it became both the guardian of the once collective property of the citizens of the whole of Yugoslavia and a social institution of one of Yugoslavia's former republics.

The Museum's website is organized in four main sections: Exhibitions, Programs, Visit the Museum and Get to know the Museum. Under the heading "Space" on the Museum's website in the section Visit the Museum, we can learn more about the Museum's history. In the English version, this section can be found under the heading Visit the Museum and subsection Museum complex. It is important to notice that the Serbian and the English version of the website are not identical, thus to keep in mind we are mostly referring to the Serbian version in this article, unless stated differently.

In the webpage section Space, there are three photographs (one of which is presented below), showing the three main buildings of the Museum's complex. All the photographs show the spaces without any people, emphasizing the monumentality of the spaces. Further on, we can perceive that the absence of the Yugoslav period in the "History" section of Museum's website means a discontinuity of the social institution and its discourse production.

Photo 1: *The entrance to the Museum of Yugoslav History, Belgrade* (source: [www.mij.rs](http://www.mij.rs))



The origins of the Museum of Yugoslav History are found in a number of separate institutions created during the times of socialist Yugoslavia. The Museum was built as a gift of the City of Belgrade to Tito for his 70th birthday and opened in 1962. In 1982, it was named the Josip Broz Tito Memorial Center. Looking at the main building, as represented from the bottom camera angle on the photograph above, we can see how the work of architect Mika Janković was appropriately aiming at creating a space of respect and monumentality of the building to which a visitor has to arrive climbing up the path and the stairs and looking up to the Partisan heroes depicted above the entrance.

Until 1996, its main role was to commemorate Tito's life and work. The House of Flowers was built in 1975, as a winter garden, and in 1980 it became Tito's mausoleum. The remaining building, called The Old Museum, was built in 1964/1965.

In 1997, Serbian president Slobodan Milošević usurped part of the property of the Museum and made it his private residence. During the 1999 NATO bombing of Serbia, the president's residence was considered a legitimate target and thus bombed twice and completely destroyed. The symbolic destruction of Yugoslav heritage became a physical reality.

Today, the Museum states that it represents three different socio-political systems that existed under the name of "Yugoslavia" between 1918 and 2003: a monarchy, a socialist single-party state, and a federal multi-party republic. Through such existential assumptions (Fairclough 2004: 55), the Museum is imposing the continuity of the Yugoslav state, deciding to make the categorization by name and not by content. At the same time, the Museum is attempting to distance itself from its initial purpose of presenting the history of socialist Yugoslavia and from the fact that the institution itself emanates from socialist Yugoslav heritage.

Briefly looking at the exhibitions that the Museum organized over the last years (2011-2015), we can see that a great variety of exhibitions took place, either visiting (exhibitions created at other institutions) or created by the Museum. I have categorized them<sup>6</sup> by the following topics:

- *Childhood and youth* ("Fiery Greetings" (2015) - "a new rethinking of socialist Yugoslavia - its structure, character and heritage - through research of a representative picture of childhood"; "The Last Young Yugoslavs"(2011/2012) - youth culture in the period between 1977 and 1984 representing post-punk subculture, fanzines, the underground comic-book scene, alternative video, performance and photo art; etc.)
- *Art and culture* (mainly through the Tito personality cult: "The Grand Illusion" (2014) - "an exhibition of Tito as a spectator, but also as an actor, a shadow director and most powerful producer"; "Creating the Myth of Tito" (2014) - "tendencies in Yugoslav art, also as a reflection of the regime's ideology"; etc.)
- *Fashion* ("The golden album" (2011) - "fashion photos of the presidential couple of Yugoslavia 1952-1968"; "Drugarica à la mode (2011) an exhibition in cooperation with the Museum of Contemporary Art in Zagreb on fashion developments between 1945 and 1960; etc.)

---

6. Certainly, we have herein categorized only the majority and not the all of the Museum's exhibitions.

- *Everyday life* ("They never had it better?" (2014/2015) – "about modernization and everyday life in socialist Yugoslavia, which represents the phenomenon of everyday life, free time and leisure in Yugoslavia," and "looks for answers to the following questions: did Yugoslavs find prosperity; how, when and why did they lose it; what was the education system; what was social and cultural life like; in which segments of life can we identify modernization"; "Technology to the people" (2012) – "scenes of modernization of socialist Yugoslavia from 1955-1975"; etc.)

The choice of themes shows the extent to which the Museum has sought to distance itself from any "political" topics. The transversal theme of the personality cult (of Tito) does occur, on a majority of occasions; however, the only other example of looking into a more "political" theme can be found in the exhibition "Non-Aligned - from Belgrade to Belgrade" (2011) organized on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of the first Non-Aligned Summit held in Belgrade. The lack of problematization of a number of topics relating to ex-Yugoslav political history shows that the Museum deals cautiously with issues that have been the object of historical revisionism by the state. At the same time, it is important that we note that the Museum's complementary program – the public debates, presentations, visiting programs etc. – does seem to be more open to "controversial" topics. These events have tackled questions relating to (post-) Yugoslav citizenship, the economic policies of socialist Yugoslavia, etc. Regarding the exhibition we are analyzing, a number of critical discussions already took place during the public debates organized by the Museum, which accompanied the exhibition's program. This was also the case with the results of questionnaires and focus groups that were conducted as part of the evaluation of the exhibition that can be found in the electronic version of the catalog that we have analyzed. These initiatives show the Museum's openness towards further discussion on the public narratives on Yugoslavia. The most prominent dialogue space was opened through the additional program of the Museum, led by the curator Tatomir Toroman, called "Talks about Yugoslavia: Introduction to (post-) Yugoslav Studies". Nevertheless, in this article I remain focused on the catalog of the exhibition and its web pages.

The Museum, here understood as an intervening active subject (Wodak and Meyer 2001: 36), is conducting discursive and non-discursive practices, which knowledge feeds into hegemonic cultural discourses (Gramsci 1971). Discourses exercise power through a transfer of knowledge "on which the collective and individual consciousness feeds" (Wodak and Meyer 2001: 38). In other words, through its selection of topics, the Museum participates in the process of hegemonic collective memory creation in post-Yugoslav nations. So how has this been reinforced through the exhibition "*Yugoslavia: From the Beginning to the End?*"

## 4 Yugoslavia: From the Beginning to the End

In 2009, the Museum started its work on the “New Old Museum,” a project which aimed to produce a permanent exhibition on the history of Yugoslavia. The project gathered historians, museologists, art historians, a sociologist, and communications experts.<sup>7</sup> The Museum’s website states that the project was initiated out of the need for a “critical rethinking of a common past and for awareness raising about the positive and the negative common heritage and its influence on contemporary identities of new states and communities” and “new reading of this historical period” – the historical period referred to being 1918 to 1991. The project team adopted the concept for the exhibition and created a new regional team for its implementation: Jovo Bakić, sociologist, University of Belgrade; Srđan Cvetković, Institute for Contemporary History in Belgrade; Ivana Dobrivojević, Institute for Contemporary History in Belgrade; Hrvoje Klasić, historian, University of Zagreb; Vladimir Petrović, Institute for Contemporary History in Belgrade; and Ana Panić, curator, Museum of Yugoslav History in Belgrade. The team also assured that the exhibition preparation team had independent reviewers: Tvrtko Jakovina, historian, University of Zagreb; Husnija Kamberović, director, Institute for history of the University of Sarajevo; Oto Luthar, director of ZRC SAZU in Slovenia; and Predrag J. Marković, Institute for Contemporary History in Belgrade. Besides the critique of an overrepresentation of the historians in the project and exhibition teams, we should also note the low gender balance – out of total of 16 persons involved in the project and the exhibition, only 3 are women.

Our analysis focuses on the exhibition’s catalog. The electronic version analyzed is 74 pages long. It comprises 11 sections. Besides the general sections on the project and the exhibition itself, and authors’ biographies, the catalog identifies the following five sections: Yugoslavia – ID; Peoples of Yugoslavia; Two sides of the regime; Yugoslavia in the world – the world in Yugoslavia; and Economy and Society. A selection of photographs of artifacts is added at the end, along with a conclusion and evaluation section. The catalog consists of photographs and the text exhibited. It is only the conclusion and the evaluation sections that, we believe, were specifically written for the catalog, yet this is not obvious from the catalog itself.

The catalogue opens with the following words:

*Throughout most of the 20th century, on the Balkan peninsula, there was a country inspired by the desire to form a union of South Slavs. Yugoslavia, which was formed and disappeared several times, changed its name, borders, political and social systems, was marked by an exceptional diversity of ethnic groups, religions, cultures and customs existing in a comparatively small geographical area. Praised and disputed, built and undermined, it vanished from the geographical and political map*

7. Hrvoje Klasić, historian, University of Zagreb; Saša Madacki, director of the Centre for human rights, University of Sarajevo; Predrag J. Marković, Institut for contemporary history in Belgrade; Marko Popović, director and cofounder of the Centre for visual history at the Faculty for media and communication in Belgrade; Robert Ruckel, director and founder of the DDR Museum in Berlin and Katarina Živanović, director of the Museum of Yugoslav History (at the time of the start of the project).

*of the world in the late 20th century, but its legacy still exerts a strong influence on the lives of people in the region. (Bakić et al. 2012: 3)*

The exhibition represents Yugoslavia as a continuous entity, from its monarchist to its socialist state organization. This continuity in its representation undermines the specific experiences of its different political systems – the monarchist and the socialist one. Calling Yugoslavia “one of the most interesting and most controversial state experiments in the 20th century” (Bakić et al. 2012: 4) questions the statehood and legitimacy of the existence of a political entity called Yugoslavia. If we consider an experiment to be an action without a certain outcome, as the Oxford English Dictionary defines it, then the “Yugoslav idea” becomes imbued with a sense of ambiguity.

As all texts, this catalog is also “a site of struggle that shows traces of differing discourses and ideologies contending and struggling for dominance” (Wodak and Meyer 2001: 10). As their positions and ideological viewpoints were most certainly multiple, the authors distanced themselves from the beginning, claiming multiperspectivity and objectivity. In their words, “our ambition...was not encyclopedic” and “the idea is not to show a timeline of crucial events, but to cover all the important phenomena that left their mark on the countries and the societies in the land known, for more than 70 years, as Yugoslavia” (Bakić et al. 2012: 4). The salience of certain, mostly negative, political phenomena shows the discursive orientation of the authors. At the same time, the absence of certain seminal historical events like the Second World War reiterates the ideological positioning of the text. The authors describe the public discourse with the statement that “many wars and battles are still going on in some heads and Yugoslavism in the public space usually comes down to Yugonostalgia” (Bakić et al. 2012: 4). The metaphor “in some heads” indicates the demeaning relationship towards certain personal discourses (and/or memories) and suggests that Yugonostalgia as the only form of Yugoslavism left. Here we can see how the discourse analysis of the exhibition must be understood also through memory theory and by understanding the concepts of collective memory creation and the subversive potential of nostalgia (Velikonja, 2010; Petrović, 2012).

In the catalog, the authors also explain the visual concept of the exhibition introducing it through “exhibition boards as defining elements of a new deconstructed space” (Bakić et al. 2012: 59) as shown in the photographs in the catalog (Bakić et al. 2012: 5-6). The authors thus repeat their position that Yugoslavia was an experiment “which is still insufficiently known and insufficiently clear both to those who created it and to those who lived it” (Bakić et al. 2012: 59). The triangles of the exhibition boards are supposed to “suggest puzzle pieces, mosaic, or different aspects of this complex topic which is only reluctantly addressed” (Bakić et al. 2012: 59). On page 7, carrying the caption “Yugoslavia – ID”, we can see an illustration of a small man standing in front of a big and complex geometrical shape, which, we suppose, represents Yugoslavia. The visual component of a text is connected to the verbal one but not dependent on it (Kress and van Leeuwen 2006: 18). Through depicting the topic of Yugoslavia as a challenging puzzle, the exhibition (and the Museum itself) claims its hegemonic position of enlightening the visitors’ memories.

Photo 2: *The exhibition* (source: www.mij.rs)



Exhibitions are a means of mediated communication (Fairclough 2004: 77) and their format combines different semiotic modalities. Equally, catalogs combine text and images. Together, the exhibition and the accompanying catalog create a narrative. Narrative is here understood as a story presented in a certain manner (Bal 1997 in Fairclough 2004: 83) with a 'referential intention', which means that it is open to questions of truth (Fairclough 2004: 85). As mentioned earlier, historical exhibitions aim to create truthful narratives. The exhibition uses mythpoesis (legitimation through narrative) and rationalization (cognitive validity) (Van Leeuwen and Wodak 1999 in Fairclough 2004: 98) as legitimation strategies. Rationalization is achieved through the institutional position of the Museum and thus the exhibition's team. The objectivity and the scientific positioning of the institution and its team create official memory narratives through legitimate discourses of professionalized collective memory creation – what Georges Mink would call "activist historians" (Mink 2007).

Using Fairclough's methodology, we can thus say that the negative characteristics of both Yugoslavias appear prominently, whereas its positive characteristics and particularly those of socialist Yugoslavia, only appear as background features. The text of the exhibition itself, as seen in the catalog also, is trying to overcome differences and create a consensus (Fairclough 2004) between different public discourses, dialoguing collective and individual memory – of both the authors involved, but also between the Museum as a social institution and its visitors.

In our attempt to demystify the exhibition's narrative by identifying the presence, as well as the absence, of elements, I have decided not to strictly follow the structure of the sections in the catalog but rather identify and group major topics. I have identified following

themes: the impossibility of Yugoslavia; centuries-old hatred; terror state; and unsuccessful modernization processes. In the sections to follow, I will try to analyze how the exhibition attempts to create "the legitimate definition of reality" (Bourdieu 1989) gathered around these themes.

#### 4.1 The Impossibility of Yugoslavia

The topics selected for the exhibition, and presented as sections in the catalog, claim to show "the permanent existence of destabilizing elements" (Bakić et al. 2012: 4) in what is later described as Yugoslavia's "burdened" history (Bakić et al. 2012: 13). Throughout the catalog, the grammatical mood of the text remains declarative (Fairclough 2004). The use of terms such as "destabilizing", "burdened", and "crisis" in describing Yugoslavia patently shows the authors' focus on a continuous set of obstacles and builds a discourse that indicates their belief that Yugoslavia was not only an experiment but a bad experiment.

The development of Yugoslavism<sup>8</sup> and the idea of the unification of South Slav nations, or tribes as the authors call them giving us a connotation of backwardness of the Balkans (Todorova 2006), is represented as a twofold generalized movement – Croatian and Serbian (Bakić et al. 2012: 8). In the catalog, this is followed by a number of photographs and short biographies of (only) men who were in different ways considered to be pro-Yugoslav. All of them are of either Serbian or Croatian origin. All the photographs included show the seriousness of the subjects. They give a close up of the subjects and thus involve the viewer by creating an intimate relationship (Kress and van Leeuwen 2006).

Even though the themes are not presented chronologically in the text, in this section we do not see any references to the Yugoslavisms developed later in history, notably during the socialist times. As Fairclough indicates and we can note on this example of selective choice of the Yugoslavism tendencies represented, such text arrangements direct us to the significant absences in the text (Fairclough 2004) – which in this case would be the development of Yugoslavism in socialist times.

Authors further state: "The idea of Yugoslavism was, in the political sense... a cry of desperation" (Bakić et al. 2012: 10). The metaphor "a cry of desperation" seems to indicate a belief that Yugoslavism was a political tool without any deeper idealistic, emancipatory, or visionary meaning – which negates contemporary neostalgic Yugoslavism (Velikonja 2010) of its ideological significance in today's political sphere. This continues with the following statement: "Political weakness directed the ethnically close South Slavic ethnic communities to cooperate" (Bakić et al. 2012: 10).

The authors' discourse on the proximity and/or distance of the South Slav nations (or tribes) further dubs the processes of Yugoslav nation building as "propaganda about cultural closeness" (Bakić et al. 2012: 10). Since "living together in a new state was a big challenge for everyone" (Bakić et al. 2012: 21), this propaganda is explained as the "wrong means" used by political elites in an attempt to bring South Slavs closer. From this point of view, all Yugoslavisms were thus the same: the one of King Alexander Karadjordjević

---

8. A political and ideological movement from 19th century propagating the idea of cultural and state unification of South Slavs.

and the idea of “brotherhood and unity” of Yugoslav communists (Bakić et al. 2012: 21). Even though the exhibition and the catalog have one section dedicated to political assassinations (Bakić et al. 2012: 15), we can notice a significant absence (Fairclough 2004) of the assassination of the Archduke Franz Ferdinand carried out by Gavrilo Princip and the “Young Bosnia” movement. Thus not all dissident, critical or socialist Yugoslav ideas and ideologies were represented in this section and the authors’ position is colliding with the official discourses that deny the political subjectivity to the present nostalgic subjects (Velikonja 2010; Petrović 2012).

## 4.2 Centuries-Old Hatred

Analyzing the authors’ explanations of the social events as part of the history of Yugoslavia, for example the dissolution of the second Yugoslavia, we can see that authors used additions, understood as explanations and causes for evaluating and representing events (Fairclough 2004: 139), to implicate that ethnic differences were the key factor for the dissolution of Yugoslavia. The statements in the catalog are made as categorical and epistemic modalities (Fairclough 2004: 167) coinciding with the existing political mythology in ex-Yugoslav countries. Fairclough explains how modalities uncover authors’ commitments to truth (Fairclough 2004: 168) and thus in this case, remaining in the field of assertion and denial by making categorical statements. Epistemic modalities are assertive statements emanating in this case from the scientific background of the authors and the institutional position of the Museum. In the chapter “The Peoples of Yugoslavia”, the authors repeat that, “the problem that burdened the South Slav state throughout its existence was the ethnic issue” (Bakić et al. 2012: 18). Ethnic communities are represented as generic, impersonal, and passive social actors (Fairclough 2004). The dissolution of Yugoslavia is (at least partially) explained through these evaluations that appear as statements (Fairclough 2004): [communities in different regions of Yugoslavia] “never surpassed differences in their economic, cultural, and political level of development” (Bakić et al. 2012: 20).

A political myth explains the falsification of historical facts, being an “imaginary construct, distorted or biased, an unreliable, controversial explanation of reality” (Girardet 2000: 13). Still, as Girardet tells us, it serves the purpose of explaining and understanding the present, as a tool which “edits a confusing aggregate of facts and events” (Girardet 2000:13). Political elites, by creating political myths of the strong ethno nationalist divides among (ex) Yugoslav people, justified the violent wars of the nineties. This is the point where we find that the discourse of the exhibition catalog and that of political elites meet.

The discourse of the exhibition’s catalog on the Second World War maintains a declarative grammatical mood, with which it confirms interethnic difficulties. It claims that the Second World War “had features of an interethnic and ideological war of all against all and of extreme cruelty” (Bakić et al. 2012: 7). The Chetnik and Ustashi movements are called “movements of national provenance” (Bakić et al. 2012: 14) without any further elaboration of their collaborationist nature. The decision of the monarchist government at the time to adopt a pact with Nazi Germany is explained as follows: “Like other countries in the region, Yugoslavia tried to adapt to this change (the rise of Nazi Germany and

fascist Italy) by becoming closer to Germany." With the use of the generalization "other countries in the region," collaboration is represented as a mere political trend. Here we can see how the catalog's discourse aligns with the official narratives and collective memory discourses, both of which are revisionist – a number of judicial processes regarding rehabilitation of the actors of the collaborationist regime and movements have taken place in Serbia since 2000.

Throughout the catalog, the authors remain mostly focused on Croatian and Serbian ethnic communities. In contrast, Yugoslav identity is explained through the position of Muslim citizens: "A large number of Muslim inhabitants of Bosnia and Herzegovina were of Slavic descent. When required to state their national affiliation, they had to declare themselves as ethnically undecided Yugoslavs or as Croats or Serbs" (Bakić et al. 2012: 18). Here we can see two elements: first, the authors claim that Yugoslav identity is "ethnically undecided" and second, that adherence to it took place largely due to a lack of another choice. Generalizations concerning social actors continue: "Until the end of Yugoslavia, the percentage of the population that declared itself as Yugoslav remained low (5.4% at the 1981 census). One of the most common reasons were so-called mixed marriages in which spouses belonged to different ethnicities. For their children it was "easier" to declare themselves supranational." (Bakić et al. 2012: 20).

As Pavle Levi explains: "The naturalization of ethnic hatreds in the region, its apparently comprehensible or even inevitable character, represents a mechanism of ideological deception by which political and cultural elites have justified their territorial pretensions, power demands and armed conflicts" (Levi 2009: 14). The salience of elements accentuating differences between ethnic communities and the absence of other Yugoslav aspirations, as well as the result of the Yugoslav nation-building process could indicate that the authors' position corresponds to that of post-Yugoslav political elites in explaining the ethnic conflicts which took place during the dissolution of the country and thus reinforcing collective memory of "centuries-old hatreds."

#### **4.3 Terror State**

The catalog also examines political persecutions in monarchist Yugoslavia while stating that, regarding persecutions, monarchist "Yugoslavia did not differ from other countries in the region and European democracies" (Bakić et al. 2012: 24). Denying any specificity and "awarding" Yugoslavia a place among "European democracies" is an evaluative statement (Fairclough 2004) which minimizes the gravity of these actions. (Persecuted) communists are named as "extreme elements" (Bakić et al. 2012: 25) and an obstacle to the development of democracy (Bakić et al. 2012: 23), together with other extremist groups, including Ustashis. Such universalizing of "all radicals" represents part of the ideological work of the authors (Fairclough 2004: 58). Along the same lines, the authors give an evaluative statement (Fairclough 2013) saying that "...the treatment of political prisoners was satisfactory and the right to defense was respected" (Bakić et al. 2012: 24). In opposition to the evaluative statements on political persecutions during monarchist Yugoslavia, we can identify a declarative grammatical mood (Fairclough 2004: 115) when

looking at the text relating to political persecutions in socialist Yugoslavia. Firstly, we notice a salience of synonyms for political persecutions already in the titles and the subtitles: *Extermination of peoples' enemies - Liquidation of class and political enemies - Elimination of non-communist allies* (Bakić et al. 2012: 26), all under the title *Stalinism in Yugoslavia*. Explanatory phrases follow: "revolutionary terror" emanated from "communists' hatred and desire for revenge" (Bakić et al. 2012: 26). The authors thus explicitly use evaluations to appear as statements (Fairclough 2004). Political processes are described as "faked," "wild," "non-institutional," "mass," etc. Also, the processes of change in the economic system (Bakić et al. 2012: 28) were implemented through "mass arrests," "persecutions of tens of thousands," "implemented with a significant engagement of the secret services (UDBA), police and sometimes army, often with the brutal use of force," "unprecedented case of repression," etc.

Without documenting those declarative statements with sources and numbers, they remain highly evaluative and in line with the present trends of official public narratives of rehabilitation through legislative (2004) and judicial processes (Dražić Mihajlović 2015, Milan Nedić, currently in process). Or as Georges Mink would explain, the symbolic past is having a mobilizing effect that is influencing the partisan actors (Mink 2007).

#### 4.4 Unsuccessful Modernization Processes

Socio-economic reality is often evoked as the key element for the sentiment of Yugo-nostalgia – citizens refer to the grand modernization and industrialization successes of socialist Yugoslavia, along with a living standard which was much higher in comparison to post-Yugoslav transition times (Velikonja 2010; Petrović 2012). The authors agree that, "Yugoslavia was transformed from a backward country with low rates of urbanization into an industrial middle-income developed economy" (Bakić et al. 2012: 37). The rest of the discourse of the catalog's text notes failures, crises, and problems. The phrases used, even when discussing positive and progressive changes, continue to refer to "controlled freedom" and "liberal façade" (Bakić et al. 2012: 28). The authors maintain a negative evaluative positioning towards the economic reality of socialist Yugoslavia and its effects through overlexicalization (Fairclough 2004) of the crisis.

The post-WWII five-year plan is called a "plan of failed investment" (Bakić et al. 2012: 39), explained by "irrational investments" which "surpassed Yugoslav needs and capabilities" (idem). The processes of modernization, industrialization, and urbanization are claimed to have only opened the "space for a permanent political and economic crisis that will result in the dissolution of the state" (Bakić et al. 2012: 40). The social benefits system is also referred to as "irrational" (Bakić et al. 2012: 42) and "Ante Marković's reform program came too late" (idem). The text continuously assesses the economic policies and effects of socialist Yugoslavia, often through the use of generalizations. Adjectives and terms used point to the authors' evaluative positions towards the system in question. The genre and style of the text become more journalistic than historiographic in parts of the text which negatively assess the social events described. In this dialoguing space where the exhibition's discourse is painting a negative image of socio-economic history

of socialist Yugoslavia, we can see the nostalgic discourses opposing in creation of the counter-memory, as a continuous battle against "the confiscation of memory" (Boym 2001: 61).

Discussing the role and the position of women in socialist Yugoslavia, significant absences (Fairclough 2004) are noted in relation to seminal events such as the existence and activities of the AFŽ (Women's Anti-fascist Front); the women's role in the anti-fascist struggle in WWII; women's suffrage in 1945; the legalization of abortion (to name just a few). Significant absences, as identified through critical discourse analysis, represent the field of forgetting in memory theory, becoming "organized forgetting" (Connerton 1989: 14). The text briefly addresses the growing introduction of women into the labor force as a statement of fact (Fairclough 2004): "women were engaged in (physically demanding jobs) but still earned less and were considered an unprofitable and expensive labor force which belongs at home" (Bakić et al. 2012: 41). Continuous depersonalization leads to the lack of identification of agents and the affected. To give an example, the above-mentioned statement leaves us with a number of questions. Were all women engaged in physically demanding jobs? Who considered that women belonged at home?

Without mentioning the widening access of women to birth control and medical attention, the authors further state: "Due to changes in the living conditions, the number of children born out of wedlock grew continuously. Social and ethical pressure, in all republics except Slovenia, meant that young mothers mostly wanted to get rid of their children" (Bakić et al. 2012: 41). "Getting rid of" is placed in quotation marks, and like in many other places in the text, is offered as a quote without providing the source or used as a colloquial expression of the authors. Once again, the statements remain ambiguous. Were the majority of young mothers "getting rid" of their children? Is this a critique of legalized abortion or were young mothers giving away their children to public social institutions and for what reasons?

## 5 Conclusion

Different discourses are different perspectives on the world (Fairclough 2004: 124). Yugoslav history and society remain "an unfinished text" (Laclau 1981: 176 in Wodak and Meyer 2001). The text of the catalog analyzed in this article is certainly not sufficient to give us a full overview of the exhibition itself, but provides us with enough information to understand its discourse.

In the catalog's conclusion, the curator Ana Panić calls for, among other things, the "need, today more than ever, to look into emancipatory practices, anti-fascism, and all the undeniable successes of the country such as modernization and industrialization" (Panić in Bakić et al. 2012: 61). However, this message does not come through in the rest of the exhibition catalog. As we have shown, the catalog is mostly grouped around four underlying themes: impossibility of a Yugoslav project; the continuous hatred and discord between different ethnic communities; the backwardness in the democratic development through depicting the authoritarian tendencies and emphasizing the criminal aspect of socialist Yugoslavia while minimizing the collaborationist nature of the state and its elements in the

Second World War and underlining the lack of (profound) modernization success in socialist Yugoslavia. The Museum, representing a social institution with official legitimacy, can strongly influence public discourses and participate in the creation of collective memory. While the Museum's additional programs are opening dialogue spaces, the exhibition I have analyzed seems to largely follow the official public discourses. Reinforcing the idea of Yugoslavism existing only as a past experiment and as a banal nostalgic sentiment today, "in some heads," by using an abundance of negative phenomena and other discursive strategies depicted in the article, the exhibition remains part of the official memory narratives of the Republic of Serbia. The nostalgic elements are presented to the visitors through cultural artifacts, including its list in the catalog (Bakić et al. 2012: 50-56), leaving them to the intimate memories of visitors. What an exhibition decides to remember and what it decides to forget constitutes the backbone of the institutionalized cultural memory and as such, remains a fundamental element within the official memory politics of a state.

## Bibliography

- Bourdieu, Pierre (1989): Social Space and Symbolic Power. *Sociological Theory*, 7 (1): 14-25.
- Boyer, Dominic (2010): From Algos to Autonomous: Nostalgic Eastern Europe as Postimperial Mania. In M. Todorova and Z. Gille (eds.): *Postcommunist Nostalgia*: 17-28. New York: Berghahn.
- Boym, Svetlana (2001): *The Future of Nostalgia*. New York: Basic Books.
- Buden, Boris (2012): *Zona prelaska – O kraju postkomunizma*. Beograd: Fabrika knjiga.
- Buden, Boris et al. (2013): *Uvod u prošlost*. Novi Sad: Centarzanove medije\_kuda.org.
- Connerton, Paul (1989): *How Societies Remember*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Fairclough, Norman (2004): *Analysing discourse – Textual analysis for social research*. Taylor & Francis e-library.
- Foucault, Michel (1984): Truth and Power. In P. Rabinow (ed.): *The Foucault Reader*: 51-75. New York: Pantheon.
- Fraser, Andrea (2005): From the Critique of Institutions to an Institution of Critique. *Artforum New York*, 44 (1): 278-286.
- Gee, James Paul (1999): *An Introduction to Discourse Analysis*. London: Routledge.
- Girardet, Raoul (2000): *Politički mitovi i mitologije*. Belgrade: Biblioteka XX vek.
- Gramsci, Antonio (1971): *Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci*. New York: International Publishers.
- Grek, Sotiria (2005): *Museums and Critical Discourse Analysis: Disentangling Exhibition Narratives*. Conference Proceedings: International Conference on Critical Discourse Analysis: 209-217. University of Tasmania, Australia.
- Halbwachs, Maurice (1968): *La mémoire collective*. Paris: Presses universitaires de France.
- Kress, Gunthar, and van Leeuwen, Theo (2006): *Reading Images – The Grammar of Visual Design*. Abingdon: Routledge.
- Laclau, Ernesto, and Mouffe, Chantal (1985): *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy – towards a radical democratic politics*. London: Versobooks.
- Leeuwen, Theo van (2005): *Introducing social semiotics*. Taylor & Francis e-library.
- Levi, Pavle (2009): *Raspad Jugoslavije na filmu*. Belgrade: Biblioteka XX vek.

- Liu, Jing (2013): Visual Images Interpretative Strategies in Multimodal Texts. *Journal of Language Teaching and Research*, 4 (6): 1259-1263.
- Mink, Georges (2007): Introduction : l'Europe et ses passés douloureux : stratégies historicisantes et usages de l'Europe. In G. Mink and L. Neumayer (eds.): *L'Europe et ses passés douloureux*: 11-36 Paris: La Découverte.
- Petrović, Tanja (2012): *Yuropa – jugoslovensko nasleđe i politike budućnosti u postjugoslovenskim društvima*. Belgrade: Fabrika knjiga.
- Rupnik, Jacques (ed.) (2004): *Les Européens face à l'élargissement: perceptions, acteurs, enjeux*. Paris: Presses de Sciences Po.
- Todorov, Tzvetan (1998): *L'homme dépaycé*. Paris: Seuil.
- Todorova, Maria and Gille, Zsuzsa (eds.) (2010): *Postcommunist nostalgia*. New York: Berghahn.
- Todorova, Marija (2006): *Imaginarni Balkan*. Belgrade: Biblioteka XX vek.
- Velikonja, Mitja (2010): *Titostalgija*. Belgrade: Biblioteka XX vek.
- Wodak, Ruth, and Meyer, Michael (2001): *Methods of Critical Discourse Analysis*. London: SAGE publications.

## Sources

- Bakić et al. (2012): *Catalogue Yugoslavia from the Beginning to the End*. Belgrade: Museum of Yugoslav History.
- Statutes of the Museum of Yugoslav History (Statut muzeja) (2012), I 01-01 number 60/1, Belgrade.

## Web pages

- Buden, Boris (2014): *Kultura je najvažniji ideologem stvarnosti*. Available from: <http://www.kulturpunkt.hr/content/kultura-je-najvazniji-ideologem-stvarnosti> (Accessed 15.08.2015)
- Fairclough, Norman (2012): *Critical Discourse Analysis*. Available from: [https://www.academia.edu/3791325/Critical\\_discourse\\_analysis\\_2012\\_](https://www.academia.edu/3791325/Critical_discourse_analysis_2012_) (Accessed 05.02.2016)
- Museum of Yugoslav History website. Available from: [www.mij.rs](http://www.mij.rs) (Accessed 08.11.2015)
- Museum of Yugoslav History website. Exhibition Yugoslavia: From the Beginning to the End. Available from: <http://www.mij.rs/upoznajte/istorija-jugoslavije/127/izlozba-jugoslavija-od-pocetka-do-kraja.html> (Accessed 05.02.2016).
- Vogel, Felix (2013): Notes on exhibition history in curatorial discourse in (New) Institution(alism), Issue 21. Available from: <http://www.on-curating.org/index.php/issue-21-reader/new-institutionalism-revisited.html#.Vj80AberTIU> (Accessed 10.09.2015).

## Author's data

Milica Popović, PhD Student, Balkan Studies, Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Ljubljana  
Kneginje Zorke 39, 11000 Belgrade, Serbia  
[milica.popovic@gmail.com](mailto:milica.popovic@gmail.com)