

Visitors can write down their impressions of the exhibition on separate sticky notes, which are then attached to the walls. Museum of Crimes against Humanity and Genocide, image taken September 20, 2022.

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The Sarajevo museums and preserving the memory of the Bosnian War and war crimes

by **Kateryna Shymkevych** and **Serhii Bilivnenko**

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abstract

Museums in Sarajevo (BiH) serve as sites for preserving and re-examining the memory of the war and war crimes of the 1990s. Engagement with memory takes place across both micro- and macro-contexts, which helps to flesh out individual narratives, highlight the specific characteristics of events, and underscore traumatic aspects. In this capacity, these museums have evolved into educational and research hubs dedicated to addressing the memory of the war and attempting to overcome societal trauma. A drawback, however, is the focus on a single perspective – the Bosniak one – to the exclusion of the Bosnian Serb and Bosnian Croat perspectives on the war and the associated war crimes.

KEYWORDS: Sarajevo museums, Bosniaks, war crimes, Srebrenica, memorialization.

Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) and Bosnian society are the most severely affected among the countries of the former Yugoslavia by the dissolution of the federation and the war of 1992–1995. This is particularly important for the Bosniaks, who suffered the highest number of casualties during this war.[1] It was not merely a matter of physical or psychological losses; there was an attempt to destroy the Bosniaks as a nation by stripping them of their identity, statehood, history, memory, culture, and traditions, as well as their right to remember the past and build a future. Museums and museum spaces serve as reminders of this tragedy, drawing attention to it while simultaneously promoting peace, peaceful coexistence, and the prevention of similar crimes in the future. A country that during the Yugoslav period[2] was considered an example of religious tolerance, tolerance in general, and peaceful coexistence among different ethnic groups became, in the early 1990s, a reflection of the journalistic stereotype of the Balkans as Europe's powder keg. The war in Bosnia and Herzegovina, its consequences, and its significance for the state, society, and the entire post-Yugoslav space have proved complex, multilayered, and long-lasting. Researchers, artists, writers, and cultural figures are engaged in re-examining the war, its consequences, and the traumas of wartime and the post-war period. Museum spaces play an important role in this process; for several decades, they have been used as historical and educational centres and as places for preserving and re-examining the tragic events of the 1990s. In every city in BiH, one can find museums whose exhibitions, either in whole or in part, are dedicated to the 1992–1995 war, war crimes, and the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia. The largest concentration of such museums is in Sarajevo, where they have long been part of the educational process in schools and higher education institutions, centres for preserving memory, and venues for various commemorative and educational events. Importantly, Sarajevo's museums have become an integral part of the capital of BiH's tourism landscape and have developed into distinct tourist routes and destinations.

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Museum spaces in Sarajevo and the war of 1992–1995

Bosnia and Herzegovina in its present form appeared on the map of Europe and the Western Balkans as a result of the signing of the Dayton Peace Accords at the end of 1995. The peace agreement created a rather complex state consisting of two entities (ethnic state formations), the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Republika Srpska, as well as the Brčko District, which is simultaneously part of both entities. At the same time, there is a supranational international institution – the Office of the High Representative of the international community. A separate position of international supervisor was established for the Brčko District.

THE CAPITAL OF THE COUNTRY and of the Federation of BiH entity is the city of Sarajevo. In this entity, the vast majority of the population are Bosniaks and Bosnian Croats. In the Republika Srpska entity, the vast majority of the population are Bosnian Serbs. Representatives of national minorities live in each of the entities, including Turks, Albanians, Montenegrins, Roma, Macedonians, Jews, Hungarians, Italians, Romanians, and many others.[3] The constituent peoples of BiH are recognized as Bosniaks, Bosnian Croats, and Bosnian Serbs. According to the preamble to the Constitution of BiH, national minorities are classified as "Others".[4]

Reference to the state structure of BiH and the characteristics of its population is important for understanding how museum institutions in BiH are established and operate. Each entity upholds its own narrative of the events of the 1990s, which influences the creation of museum exhibitions and the preservation of memories of the war in BiH. In Sarajevo's museums, this subject is central. The focus is on presenting how the 1992–1995 war is interpreted specifically by Bosniaks. They use several definitions: the "Greater Serbian aggression against Bosnia and Herzegovina in 1992–1995" and the "defensive liberation war". Meanwhile, Bosnian Croats use the term "Homeland War of 1992–1995", which echoes the term used in Croatia for the war of 1991–1995. Bosnian Serbs call the war a "defensive liberation war". Accordingly, Sarajevo's museums tell the story of the "Greater Serbian aggression against BiH in 1992–1995". The Bosnian Croat-Bosniak conflict is practically not depicted. The Bosnian Serb context is left out, as Serbs from Republika Srpska,[5] the Republic of Serbian Krajina[6], and Serbia are regarded as enemies. Consequently, military operations, war crimes, crimes against humanity, and the genocide in Srebrenica are examined through the lens of the narrative pres-

PHOTO: WIKIMEDIA



The location of the Sarajevo tunnel's entrance is now a museum.



Sarajevo Tunnel Museum visitors watch educational videos. PHOTO: WIKIMEDIA

ent in Bosniak and Bosnian Croat practices of public memory. A similar situation can be observed in museums in Republika Srpska, where Bosniaks and their political and state leadership are identified as the main perpetrators of the 1992–1995 war in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

MUSEUMS IN SARAJEVO whose exhibitions recount the war and war crimes began to be established in the Bosnian capital during the post-war period. The largest institutions include the Historical Museum of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the War Childhood Museum, the Tunnel of Hope (Sarajevo War Tunnel), the Military Museum 1992, Gallery 11/07/95, the Museum of Crimes Against Humanity and Genocide 1992–1995, the Museum of the Siege of Sarajevo 1992–1995, the Kovači Memorial Centre and Museum of Heroes of the Liberation War, the House of the Liberators – Žuč, and others. According to TripAdvisor rankings, these museums are among the most popular attractions among visitors to the city. Museum exhibitions have been created using archival documents and materials, photographs and video footage, objects, and personal belongings. These exhibitions are multimedia-based, and visitors are provided with audio guides so that they can independently select their preferred language and listen to accounts of each exhibit. The use of video and audio allows the exhibitions to "speak" to visitors, immersing them in the atmosphere of the 1992–1995 war and creating corresponding associations with documents, photographs, and people's personal belongings. The screening of documentary footage of the war, the suffering of civilians, and the provision of medical assistance to them under extremely difficult conditions makes an additional powerful impression.

The war is the central theme, within which specific subjects are distinguished, including war crimes, the deaths of children, concentration camps, the genocide in Srebrenica, mass graves, the work of the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia, and the signing of the Dayton Peace Agreement in 1995. These subjects are not secondary; they are just as central as the theme of the war itself. They are deliberately placed within the context of the war, highlighting key aspects that remain unprocessed and require continuous reflection.

A distinctive feature of Sarajevo's museum exhibitions is that each contains a substantial section devoted to the siege of Sarajevo and the suffering of its residents. Detailed accounts can be found at the Historical Museum of Bosnia and Herzegovina[7] and the Tunnel of Hope.[8] In 2023, the Museum of the Siege of Sarajevo 1992–1995 opened in the capital of BiH. It should be regarded as one of the important centres of remembrance of the siege of the city and its role in the lives of Sarajevo's residents.[9] The establishment of a separate museum focused on the siege of Sarajevo once again demonstrates that the tragic events of that time remain triggering and traumatic for Bosniaks. This is reflected in the museum's predominantly dark color scheme and in the selection of photographs, audio and video materials, and exhibits. To intensify the tragic effect and make the museum memorable, its name is displayed against a black background, with the letters glowing red. From the outset, this conveys to visitors an understanding that the history of the siege of Sarajevo struck a deeply personal chord with every resident of the city, and that this is a history of loss that must be continually recounted and brought to mind.

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MUSEUMS PERFORM a specific function: they do not simply recount the tragic pages of 1992–1995; they are intended to build communication with younger generations and foreign audiences, particularly visitors to their exhibitions. For this reason, museums are invariably included in many of the tourist tours conducted in Sarajevo. In this way, the narrative is transmitted



War Childhood Museum in Sarajevo. PHOTO: KATERYNA SHYMKEVYCH



Prison in Museum of War and Genocide, Sarajevo. PHOTO: KATERYNA SHYMKEVYCH

to foreign audiences, with particular emphasis on the desire of the Serbs to destroy the Bosniaks, their history, and their culture. Museum exhibitions serve to preserve memory and sustain the state-building narrative of Greater Serbian aggression against Bosnia and Herzegovina. Museums therefore also function as educational and public outreach institutions, as well as teaching facilities, whose visits form part of school and university education in Sarajevo. This is particularly true of the students at schools, for whom museums organize interactive history lessons and various workshops that include discussions of the exhibitions and opportunities to express their own opinions on the events of the 1992–1995 war. Such activities are frequently held at the Historical Museum of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the War Childhood Museum[10], the Tunnel of Hope, Gallery 11/07/95,[11] and the Museum of Crimes Against Humanity and Genocide 1992–1995.[12]

Features of the exhibitions

War and war crimes are the central themes of each exhibition, allowing them to be identified as the macro-context of the exhibitions. Attention is consistently focused on Bosnia and Herzegovina's achievement of independence, with a detailed chronology of events, the course of military campaigns, and the Dayton Peace Agreement, which brought the war to an end. Crimes against the civilians – war crimes, crimes against humanity, and genocide – are presented as consequences of aggression against BiH. Separate subthemes preserved by the exhibitions as a memory of those events, while simultaneously serving as sources for studying the events of that period, include the activities of international humanitarian organizations, the work of the UN, the deployment of the United Nations Protection Force, and the establishment of safe areas for the civilian population. The establishment and activities of the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) are an integral component of the macro-context. In this way, the exhibitions convey to visitors the information that international justice was applied to war criminals. A specific feature of how the ICTY is presented is the demonstration of crimes against Bosniaks and Bosnia and Herzegovina, with the names of Slobodan Milošević, Radovan Krstić, Radovan Karadžić, Ratko Mladić, and others mentioned.

"WAR AND WAR CRIMES ARE THE CENTRAL THEMES OF EACH EXHIBITION, ALLOWING THEM TO BE IDENTIFIED AS THE MACRO-CONTEXT OF THE EXHIBITIONS."

The exhibitions are intended not simply to tell the story of the war and the crimes, but to give visitors an understanding of the existence of a deliberate Serbian plan against BiH and the Bosniaks. Therefore, the displays include materials on the formation of the idea of "Greater Serbia", the history of the establishment of Republika Srpska, and the destruction of Bosniak historical and cultural heritage. Attention is also paid to the existence of the separatist formation of the Bosnian Croats, the Republic of Herzeg-Bosnia, and its armed forces, the Croatian Defence Council, which fought against the government army of Bosnia and Herzegovina. The presentation in the exhibitions of the Bosniaks as victims of aggression by Serbs and Bosnian Croats is the central idea that visitors are expected to remember and understand about the 1992–1995 war in BiH.

A DETAILED CHRONOLOGY is invariably provided of the signing of peace agreements with the Bosnian Croats (the Washington Agreement) in 1994 and with the Bosnian Serbs (the Dayton Peace Agreement) in 1995. These documents are considered important stages of the war that created modern, post-Dayton Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Materials on war crimes are intended to reinforce the "Greater Serbia" narrative and intensify the emotional percep-



Gallery 11/07/95 is an exhibition space aiming to preserve the memory of the Srebrenica tragedy and the 8,372 persons who perished in the massacres.

PHOTO: GALLERY 11/07/95

tion of the fact that the Bosniaks became victims of aggression and criminal acts. For this reason, the exhibitions contain accounts of victims of concentration camps[13] and the genocide in Srebrenica,[14] as well as objects and personal belongings of those affected (the murdered, prisoners, and refugees).[15]

The detailed presentation of crimes against Bosniak civilians can be traced in the micro-context of the exhibitions, where the narrative moves from the history of the war to the examination of specific types of crimes. The central narrative remains the genocide in Srebrenica. At the same time, the exhibitions emphasize that Bosnian Serbs committed genocide against Bosniaks in other cities in BiH – Zvornik, Goražde, Keraterm, and Bihać – highlighting the systematic nature of their actions. The exhibition materials show that only the killing of civilians in Srebrenica has been proven to constitute genocide by the ICTY. In Gallery 11/07/95 and the Museum of Crimes Against Humanity and Genocide 1992–1995, a substantial part of the exhibitions is devoted to the tragedy of Srebrenica, mass graves, and concentration camps. The aim and purpose are to convey that these crimes were so widespread that their consequences are still felt today. They are evident in the ongoing work of forensic experts at various mass-grave sites. Models of concentration camps and the arrangement of areas within museums as prison cells demonstrate the cruelty with which captives were treated.[16]

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The themes of the siege of Sarajevo, the deaths of the city's residents, child victims, and the delivery of humanitarian aid to the city by international organizations through the tunnel beneath Butmir Airport (the Tunnel of Hope) can be identified as a separate area within the micro-context. This is a relatively local context within Sarajevo's Museum exhibitions, but it is an important part of preserving the memory of the events of 1992–1995.[17] This is why Sarajevo has separate museums dedicated to children and childhood during wartime,[18] the siege of Sarajevo,[19] and the Tunnel of Hope.[20] Through such local themes, museums expand the culture of remembrance of the war and crimes. In other cities in the country, these themes are not central, but a certain part of the exhibitions is invariably devoted to them. For example, the Museum of War and Genocide Victims 1992–1995 operates in Mostar.[21] It is a branch of Sarajevo's Museum of Crimes Against Humanity and Genocide 1992–1995. It presents accounts of war crimes by expanding the local context to include, among other things, the destruction of the Old Bridge in Mostar and crimes committed by the Croatian Defence Council against Bosniaks.[22]

THE PRESENCE OF macro- and micro-contexts in Sarajevo's museum exhibitions contributes to a detailed presentation of military operations and the disclosure of the characteristics and specific features of each type of crime against the civilian population. It

also makes it possible to preserve the memory of events without the risk of losing important meanings and narratives. Researchers who use museum exhibitions, their materials, and victims' testimonies have the opportunity to study the events of the 1992–1995 war systematically and consistently and to become familiar with the specific features of the "Greater Serbia" project, which the Serbian leadership used to justify crimes against civilians.

AT THE SAME TIME, it is worth emphasizing a certain fragmentary and one-sided nature of the exhibitions, as they do not address crimes against Bosnian Serbs and Bosnian Croats or members of national minorities. Consequently, visitors are offered only a selected narrative about Bosniak suffering, one that is clearly constructed through the materials and testimonies presented. This negatively affects the fragmented preservation of the memory of these events, depriving museum visitors of the opportunity to make their own assessments and draw their own conclusions about the war and war crimes.

The instrumentalization of memory

The exhibitions and museums serve as instruments of the culture of remembrance concerning the 1992–1995 war and war crimes against Bosniaks. The exhibitions themselves reflect collected and systematized documentary, visual, and audio materials, which are presented to visitors and researchers in a specific form. Testimonies from victims of crimes or their relatives, recollections of Sarajevo residents, including children, representatives of humanitarian missions, politicians, and military personnel are incorporated into specific narratives conveyed through exhibitions, museum brochures for visitors, and educational and public outreach activities. The emphasis created in exhibitions through the use of dark colors, with important locations and themes highlighted through lighting and lettering (for example, in red),[23] shapes museum visitors' understanding of the events of 1992–1995.[24] The constant emphasis on victimhood, together with an indication of who is responsible for it, leads visitors to museum spaces to sympathize emotionally with the Bosniaks and Bosnia and Herzegovina.

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An additional effect is achieved through watching films, listening to video interviews, and studying cartographic materials and models. Complete immersion is achieved through discussions and debates, in which school pupils are most frequently involved. They are the category of visitors most emotionally vulnerable and capable of retaining the narrative of the victimhood of BiH and the Bosniaks for longer than adults.

In some museums, adult visitors have the opportunity to become part of the process of shaping memory. Visitors can write down their impressions of the exhibition on separate sticky notes, which are then attached to the walls. This is not the traditional practice of writing in visitors' books; rather, it is direct personal participation in the culture of remembrance.

Museums use exhibitions to instrumentalize a specific narrative about the war, Bosniak suffering, the genocide in Srebrenica, and the Serbs' desire to destroy Bosnian identity. This approach fully corresponds to the official narrative prevailing among politicians and historians, although BiH has no memory strategy. Nevertheless, the activities of museums and the creation of permanent exhibitions about the war in the country, crimes against the civilian population, and their consequences for society make it possible to speak of a systematic approach to preserving memory and promoting a culture of remembrance. This is precisely why museums have become part of thematic or general sightseeing tours, while exhibition materials are supplemented by sites of memory in Sarajevo's public spaces. These include various memorials dedicated to the city's deceased residents, commemorative plaques, and the marking of "Sarajevo Roses" on roads and pavements.[25] After visiting museums, visitors can continue exploring the history of the 1990s by walking around the city or joining one of the thematic tours offered as part of war (dark) tourism.

Conclusions

Sarajevo's museums and their exhibitions are created through the efforts of civil society organizations and activists, who attract foreign funding, seek grants, and promote exhibitions among residents and visitors to the city. State support remains a distant and, for the time being, unattainable prospect for many museum institutions, as does the development of a separate state strategy for studying, collecting materials, and preserving the memory of the war, the siege of Sarajevo, the genocide in Srebrenica, mass war crimes, and their consequences. Given the very complex state structure of BiH, the emergence of such a strategy is not under consideration. Attempts have been made, however, at the initiative of and under pressure from international and European organizations. The country's authorities were supposed to develop a transitional justice strategy, in which the history of the 1992–1995 war and war crimes would have been an important component. At the time, the proposal concerned a common strategy for all the peoples living in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Attempts were made, but they proved unsuccessful.

THE EMERGENCE of thematic museums and exhibitions initiated and created by civil society organizations is therefore logical. Without museums, it would have been impossible to preserve the memory of the war so systematically and consistently, pass on knowledge to young people and visitors to the Bosnian

capital, and raise and discuss complex and controversial issues within society. A significant shortcoming is the fragmented nature of the narratives, as the exhibitions in Sarajevo's museums and, more broadly, throughout the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina reflect only the Bosniak perspective on the war and portray the Bosniaks as victims. Interestingly, none of the exhibitions in this context contains either implicit or explicit expressions of hatred towards Serbs. On the contrary, the exhibitions are presented as a warning to people, who should understand what projects such as "Greater Serbia" and the initiation of aggressive, unprovoked actions by one state against another can lead to. The idea that evil is punished and that perpetrators must be held accountable for their crimes also runs as a common thread throughout the exhibitions.

Some exhibitions, such as those concerning Srebrenica or mass graves, may shock visitors with their detailed descriptions and testimonies, but this is done to warn people against committing similar crimes in the future. In other words, such exhibitions document events, preserve memory, and serve as safeguards incorporated into the process of remembering and the culture of remembrance. Sarajevo's museum landscape of memory of the war and siege is built not "from above" but "from below"– through the efforts of civil society activists, researchers, and ordinary city residents. The narrative here is sustained by individual human stories, oral history, and objects that bear witness, transforming "dark tourism" into "heritage tourism", as a universal instrument of advocacy and warning for foreign visitors and, at the same time, a nation-building instrument for Bosniaks. Although this landscape of remembrance remains distinctly Bosniak-centred and fragmented, it contains no language of revenge – only a clear demand for accountability for crimes, remembrance of the victims, and the desire to ensure that the tragedy never happens again.

Kateryna Shymkevych, PhD in the Historical Sciences, is an Associated Professor at the Zaporizhzhia Institute of Economics and Informational Technologies, Ukraine.

Serhii Bilivnenko, PhD in the Historical Sciences, is an Associated Professor, Head of Department of Source Studies and Social Communications, Zaporizhzhia National. University, Ukraine.

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