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THE POLITICS OF POSTCOLONIAL ERASURE IN SARAJEVO

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Balkans
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Sarajevo
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To observers of contemporary Bosnia-Herzegovina, the years 2013–2016 have been marked by heightened public discontent and the emergence of civil protests. While early protests surrounded sites unmistakably pertaining to the country’s socialist legacy, such as privatized factories, more recent dissatisfaction is being articulated around sites that point to Bosnia’s past as a colony of the Hapsburg Empire. This essay argues it is not accidental that these colonial markers have become instigators of protest and dissent articulated through the memory of the recent Socialist past. Under the claim of cultural heritage protection, former colonial sites in Bosnia-Herzegovina and throughout the Balkans are unearthed tangibly to mark new realities of postcoloniality. The resurrection of Hapsburg heritage in Bosnia is instructive as it helps illuminate the wide range of tensions and contradictions inherent in the move from colonial Europe to a (post)colonial European Union. Far from wiping the slate clean and offering a fresh start, as EU actors often claim, this process is paradoxically reinstalling institutions that were once the embodiment of colonial expansion. In arguing for the expansion of postcolonial critique to include the Balkans, this essay examines the political, economic, and symbolic ways

in which Hapsburg colonial sites and institutions are restored into public visibility as registers of Sarajevo's European futures.

Introduction

Inspired by Stoler's (2016, 4–5) argument that “Geopolitics and spatial distribution of the world today, are not mimetic recurrent versions of early imperial incarnations but vital and revitalized reworkings of them,” I look at the sedimentation of an unambiguous Hapsburg present/past in the spatial reconfiguration of Sarajevo as a postwar, post-socialist, and European city. Recent efforts to restore the former glory of two institutions founded by the Hapsburg colonial administration – the National Museum of Bosnia-Herzegovina (known as the Zemaljski Muzej) and Vijećnica, the City Hall – have helped cast them as central sites for the remaking of Bosnian history and its integration into the common memory map of Europe.

Resituating Sarajevo away from the socialist past, the colonial Hapsburg legacy has become a pertinent and potent narrative in EU integration processes in Bosnia-Herzegovina (BiH), particularly as the EU has come to serve as a custodian of Hapsburg sites, granting them visibility while anaesthetizing their imperial links. This form of amnesia on the part of current EU “integration” projects, which Maldonado-Torres (2004, 30) calls the “forgetfulness of coloniality,” is rooted in the broader understanding that colonialism, “while admittedly committed by (descendants of) Europeans has no impact on Europe itself” (El-Tayeb 2016). When colonial rule is debated, it is done under the broader narrative that it was “largely benevolent, marginal to Europe, and most importantly, without negative repercussions for the present” (El-Tayeb 2011, xxii). This approach, El-Tayeb argues, flattens and obscures the contemporary power relations between Europe and its post-colonial others by decontextualizing the ways in which the colonial past continues to affect (post)colonial Europe. Extending this critique to the Balkans, Bjelić (2016, 3) argues the “foreclosure of the Balkans’ postcoloniality as a discourse on colonial and neocolonial presence is a fragment of a much larger strategic maneuvering inside a European historiography ruled by national paradigms aimed at disowning colonial history.” Relations between European colonial pasts and European presents, as Bjelić further points out, are erased under the assumption that “the European Union is a new political entity without previous history” and therefore “it somehow deserves a clean slate after formally denouncing colonialism and anti-Semitism, and the right to shift the ownership of its colonial histories to former colonial subjects” (3).

The move from colonial Europe towards a postcolonial European Union, however, is complex, particularly since Cold War knowledge production on

the Balkans has been largely defined by the spatiotemporal politics of area studies, which removed the Balkans from the postcolonial imaginary and conceptualized it as part of the East European/Socialist bloc. As a continuation and elaboration of this logic, the Balkans continue to be further differentiated in EU policy circles, most notably, in the last decade, by the subdivision into the Western Balkans and the rest. While these fragmentations are closely tied to the shifting geopolitics of EU expansion and its borders, their consequences on the freedom of movement of people across these borders have been very real. The EU–Turkey deal, as well as EU “external border control” (Armstrong and Anderson 2007), is in no small part an attempt to solidify the differentiation between those postcolonial subjects produced as redeemably, racially, and geographically “European” and designated for EU inclusion and all Others who must remain outside – a point I make at greater length elsewhere.

Critical attempts to question these configurations, chief among them Todorova’s *Imagining the Balkans*, highlight Europe’s orientalizing of the Balkans while also subtracting the Balkans from the postcolonial imaginary by claiming the Balkans are “predominantly Christian” and void of any “colonial legacies” (2009, 20). This claim opens many questions, first and foremost: How did the Balkans become predominantly Christian and how do we account for colonial legacies such as the Hapsburg one in Bosnia-Herzegovina? I suggest three main reasons. First, the erasure of Muslim histories undertaken by post-Ottoman nation-building historiographies in the Balkans has naturalized the “Christian” Hapsburg past. Second, Hapsburg colonialism is all-too-easily disavowed under the assumption that the Hapsburgs were not a colonial power, unlike other European empires. Said’s (2003, xvi) observation that “every single empire, in its official discourse, has said that it is not like all the others, that its circumstances are special, that it has a mission to enlighten, bring order and democracy, and that it uses force only as a last resort” could not be more poignant *vis-à-vis* arguments that have sought to disown Hapsburg colonial projects and their afterlives. Finally, the third and perhaps more important reason relates to the narrow focus of colonial/postcolonial studies as well as its limited application in studies of contemporary politics and international relations.

As Victorian India came to dominate the spatiotemporal coordinates of (post)colonial studies, other colonial enterprises on the peripheries of Europe have remained underexplored.¹ Analyzed under different categories and gradations of colonialism, such as “Europeanization,” “modernization,” or “humanitarian intervention,” these peripheries have more recently been labeled “post-socialist” and “post-conflict” democratic/peace-building processes. These “gradated forms” of imperial sovereignty, Stoler (2013, 3) argues, “are neither aberrant nor exceptional tactics of imperial regimes, but fundamental to their governing grammar.” Stoler’s call for the

1 It is important to differentiate between decolonial/postcolonial studies and decoloniality/postcoloniality. The later conceptualizes coloniality, among

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other things, not as a derivative of capitalism but as the imbrication of capitalism and colonialism. For more on this, see Mignolo (2011). As it relates to the former socialist world, see Tlostanova (2017), Gržinić (2014), and Kancler (2014).

2 One recent effort to conceptualize Sarajevo and BiH through postcoloniality is Majstorović and Vučković (2016).

3 For the stark urban–rural divide in Hapsburg administration policy, the prioritization of Hungarian landowners at the expense of Bosnian farmers, and the Hapsburg failure to introduce far-reaching agrarian reforms in Bosnia-Herzegovina, as a way of maintaining the status quo, see Kraljačić (1987). For the disproportionate attention towards Sarajevo and the efforts to turn it into an example of administrative success, see Donia (2006, 60).

reassessment of “what constitutes contemporary colonial relations, what counts as an imperial pursuit, and which geopolitics rest on residual or reactivated imperial practices” (4) is both timely and necessary in interrogating what makes colonial and postcolonial relations of power invisible or forgotten in studies of Sarajevo. Stoler’s lens allows us to interrogate the dominant approaches to Sarajevo (and the Balkans generally) undertaken within the conceptual frameworks of post-conflict reconstruction, post-socialist democratization, or multicultural Europeanization.² Why, I ask, have these approaches neglected to examine the city as a postcolonial site of imperial formations, given the centrality of cityscapes for the Hapsburg Empire, staged as sites of social and technological progress and accumulation of capital and industry?³ Taking into consideration Sarajevo’s importance as a showcase of a well-administered colonial province for the Hapsburgs, what can be learned about Sarajevo’s contemporary imperial condition through a focus on its *postcolonial* historicity?

In the first part of this essay, I draw on Stoler’s (2013, 14) contention that “ruins can become epicenters of renewed collective claims, as history in a spirited voice, as sites that animate both despair and new possibilities, bids for entitlement, and unexpected collaborative political projects” to examine how the rebuilding and remaking of colonial sites, from war-torn ruins to renewed sites of imperial formations, provides an opportunity for novel counter-hegemonic and decolonial practices. I first turn to the reconstruction of Vijećnica to trace the symbolic and political economies of making Europe in Sarajevo through popular responses to the reopening of the building. The second part of the essay focuses on the Zemaljski Muzej and looks at social movements emerging around its reconstruction. It follows the struggles of museum employees to keep the museum running, which have resulted into the gradual morphing of the museum itself into a site of contention and one in which political grievances are aired. In line with Petrović’s (2012, 2013) argument about the memory of Socialist industrial labor still bearing powerful potential to articulate resistance in public debates in post-Yugoslav spaces, it is the living memory of the recent Socialist past, that in both cases presented here mobilizes affect, agency, and the language around which dissent (and solidarity) are engendered and articulated.

Finally, I argue that the making and remaking of Europe through colonial/postcolonial sites in Sarajevo not only exposes the fundamental relations of inequality between both the people and the local government in the face of the EU’s spectacular show of force, but also how it reveals the contradictions that emerge from the politics of memory-making. While the EU reconstructs and invokes these sites as evidence of Sarajevo’s Europeaness and Europe’s commitment to its reconstruction and development, for workers and activists the reconstruction and reopening of these sites become the venues through which they question the EU-guided development of the city.

Colonial Sites as Cultural Legacy: The Reopening of Vijećnica, 2014

Designed by the Czech architect Karel Pařík and built between 1892 and 1896, Vijećnica served as a city hall during the Hapsburg period. The city council was housed in the city hall up until its dissolution in 1915. Though provisional at first, the structure of the city council changed little during the four decades of Hapsburg rule. As Donia (2006, 74) notes, modeled after the Ottoman-era councils, members were partly elected according to a “confessional key” to reflect the religious make-up of the city, and partly appointed, as was the mayor. Muslim landowning elites and affluent Serb merchants became government advisers and council members, the Hapsburg handmaiden in helping secure the imperial control of the city, though their political power remained very limited.⁴

4 In contrast to centralized power and direct rule in the cities, Hapsburg colonial nature manifested itself very clearly in what Mamdani (2012, 3) calls “indirect rule” in the Bosnian countryside and smaller towns, for the administration of which it relied heavily on locally existing Ottoman administration structures of governance such as the *knez* or *muhtar* (Kraljačić 1987).

Famous for its association with the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand in 1914 and its shelling during the siege of Sarajevo in 1992, Vijećnica embodies the history of the city like few other buildings. The symbol of Hapsburg colonial power in the city, the building was designed in the neo-Moorish style to seduce the locals with its “Islamic” appearance, which was not Ottoman but part of a larger Orientalist architectural trend in Europe at the time (Alic 2004).

Since its reconstruction, with funding mainly from the EU and Austria, Vijećnica has become an auditorium for an array of EU public enactments of good will for the people of Sarajevo (for a detailed history of the building, see Hartmann 2016). On 28 June 2014, to commemorate the centennial of the assassination of the Archduke, the Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra held a memorial concert at Vijećnica. The concert opened with Haydn’s String Quartet, “Emperor.” Clemens Hellsberg, the chairman of the Philharmonic, remarked in his opening speech that “the magnificent Vijećnica” is “the symbol of the City of Sarajevo, a city which itself can be considered a symbol of Europe.” Extolling the idea of a united Europe as the most visionary project of the continent, Hellsberg prayed that “God would save peaceful and European Bosnia and Herzegovina” (“Concert in Sarajevo” 2014). The remarks were pregnant with multiple ironies and contradictions that emerge from the interpellation of a colonial site as a “symbol of Europe” in postcolonial and (post-) socialist Sarajevo.

As the concert unfolded with a repertoire commemorating the Hapsburg Empire, its Emperor and the Archduke, a group of citizens wearing masks of his assassin Gavrilo Princip were protesting outside. Interrogating the erasure of the heroic act of Princip to free the country from colonial rule, one of the protesters carried a sign that read “Anti-imperialism started in Sarajevo on 28/6/1914.” To commemorate the centennial of the assassination, in the place where a socialist-era plaque honored Princip as the hero who “carried out the will of the people against tyranny,” a new plaque now

5 For ongoing debate on Mlada Bosna, see Bazdulj (2014).

simply notes the location where “Princip assassinated the Archduke.” Down the street from Vijećnica, the former Museum of Mlada Bosna, the organization to which Princip belonged, has been renamed the Museum of Sarajevo, eradicating any indication of the history of the movement.⁵ Instead, the museum is now dominated by a life-size doll display of Ferdinand of Austria and his wife Sophie, the Duchess of Hohenberg, leaving Vijećnica on the day of the assassination.

Vijećnica had reopened on May 9 2014, overlapping non-coincidentally with the day celebrating the European Union. Accompanied by a Viennese Waltz, the event was branded as a “world symbol of [the] meeting of civilizations.” Bakir Izetbegović, the Bosniak member of the tripartite presidency of BiH, called the solemn opening a “victory of civilization over barbarism” sending greetings to the world from “cosmopolitan, European and multicultural Sarajevo” (“Obnovljena Vijećnica” 2014). The High Representative for Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Austrian Valentin Inzko, explained that the initial funds were pledged by the Austrian Chancellor Franz Vranitzky during his visit to Bosnia in 1996. The High Representative of the time, Carl Bilt, had told Vranitzky that a Bosnian custom dictates that you cannot visit someone’s home without a small gift in tow. It was on this occasion, Inzko said, that the chancellor promised 1.400.000 Deutsche Mark for the reconstruction of Vijećnica (“22 godine” 2014). Adding that the rest of the funding was provided by the EU, Inzko called the reconstruction of the building a symbol of solidarity and a gift of the citizens of the EU to the people of Sarajevo.

As speeches and performances were held inside the building, outside, a 3D multimedia projection accompanied by music, a set of graphic design images, and photography, narrated a history of Sarajevo. On the façade of the newly polished Vijećnica, the show unfolded with the arrival of the tram in Sarajevo in 1885, followed by an abstract geometrical representation of the unification and disintegration of the interwar Yugoslav Kingdom, shadowed by the Nazi Occupation embodying the arrival of a dark period for the city. Triumphant music and marching partizans announced Socialist Yugoslavia, illustrated mainly through the Sarajevo Olympic Games and followed by yet another dark period of the 1990s with the siege of Sarajevo, signaled by barbed wire and images of the shelled Vijećnica. Finally, the show ended with an intensification of visual and semiotic modalities culminating in Vijećnica regaining its imperial radiance.

Earlier in the day, I had joined a group of about a thousand protesters outside Vijećnica, as the police were blocking the protesters who had used the opportunity to show their discontent with the poverty, unemployment, diminishing public space, and overall destitution that continue to plague the city twenty years after the war. Inspired by the plenum movements that had started earlier in the year (Štikis and Horvat 2014), the protesters were led

by the construction workers who had rebuilt Vijećnica and former library workers employed there during the Socialist period, when the building housed the National Library. It is important to note how the image of the worker, once central to building Socialist modernity, provoked by memories of (industrial) labor as a site of solidarity, as well as generations of workers still embodying the lived experience of Socialism, structure resistance to present-day protests. Memories of Socialism make it possible for the protesters to reclaim agency within the rather bleak conditions of post-Socialism and provide the red thread that connects this specific protest to previous articulation of dissent across the post-Yugoslav space.⁶

6 Petrović (2012, 2013), for instance, showcases the tensions that arise from reframing Socialist industrial heritage as national heritage, documenting the struggles of industrial workers, once the epitome of Socialist modernity, against the museification of their livelihoods. Petrović highlights the symbolic potential of workers, turned into silent political subjects under post-Socialism, not only to mobilize protests, but also pervasively to capture the imagination of mainstream art and popular culture.

7 The Dayton Agreement of 1995 abolished the use of Serbo-Croatian, until then the official standard language of all Yugoslav Republics. The quotation marks around the “three languages” reference the post-Dayton introduction of Bosnian, Croatian, and Serbian as official languages and

As the police cordoned off our movement towards the building, protesters shouted “This is a free city!” and “This is a sovereign country!” They displayed signs reading “Syndicates of Solidarity,” “Defiant Balkans Unite,” and “Freedom March.” As local and international authorities arrived for the ceremony, they shouted “Revolution!” “Thieves!” and “Resign!” Almir Arnaut, one of the organizers from the Bosnian city of Tuzla, spoke to the protesters, reminding them it was “the workers who rebuilt Vijećnica and now our own thieves and their foreign counterparts are staining it.”

As a fight broke out between police officers and protesters, we were led away across the Miljacka River where, surrounded, some of us ended up at Mejdan Park. I used the moment to speak to Ivana, who was carrying a “Freedom March” sign. “The protests are important because they defy the common sense of how our country is run,” she said, “and even if we don’t achieve any ‘real’ political goals, the message to citizens gathered here is clear: This is a show and we don’t want more shows, we want jobs, food, and schools.” The call for jobs, food, and schools “in three languages”⁷ had earlier become one of the most ubiquitous signs of the plenums as workers, students, and citizens had sought to confront the ethnic fragmentation of Dayton Bosnia through economic and political demands.

Most of the anger was directed at President Izetbegović and particularly at the High Representative (*Kurier*, August 2, 2014), who early into the plenum protests had warned, “if the situation escalates, we might have to think about EU-troops.” This, as Almir pointed out in a conversation later that same night, had aroused fear on the part of a considerable number of citizens who, “while keen on participating, are old enough to be reminded of what troops invoke in their memories.” I interviewed the participants of the protests a year later. One of them remarked that “the more problematic nature of the reconstruction of Vijećnica was not so much its reconstruction as much as its redesignation from university library to city council and private event space.” When asked about their political objections to Vijećnica, many protesters pointed out it wasn’t just Vijećnica that was designated for public use during Socialism but other buildings as well, including many that were identified with the previous regimes, such as the Hapsburg-era Zemlajska Banka, a

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articulate the dissatisfaction of protesters about a language policy that artificially and unnecessarily creates and propels difference.

8 The massive privatization of public space is not limited to post-Dayton Bosnia, but is a general feature of post-Socialist Eastern Europe. The EU, while certainly a driving force behind privatization, is not the only actor. Formerly state-owned enterprises were sold off to local and international investors for private gain, through loans by the IMF and other intra-state agencies.

significant monument where the flame to the brotherhood and unity of Yugoslavia still burns. The protesters argued the choice of the Socialist administration to redesign these sites for public use or commemoration of common anti-fascist struggles was an attempt to transform the colonial and royal Yugoslav landscape of authority by designating them as public spaces. Their stripping of governing clout is significant in reimagining a collective struggle that was not fragmented along ethnic and religious lines, but guided by emancipatory possibilities. The return of authority and subsequent privatization of these spaces signals a reversal of Socialist decolonializing practices and promises, a post-Cold War phenomenon in postcolonial spaces that is not confined to Sarajevo.⁸ Indeed, Araújo and Maeso (2015, 3) have noted that the restoration of colonial sites by former colonizing powers is simultaneously involved in “erasing and banalizing the histories of collective struggles and questions of political responsibility.”

In November 2016 I returned to Vijećnica and was given a tour by one of the curators, Merjem Hasanović. A local bank had hired the ceremony hall and both upper and lower corridors for a private event, so after a brief view of the new City Council chamber, we continued down the stairs into the basement, where an exhibition from 2014 had become a semi-permanent installation. Merjem noted that the exhibition, titled “Sarajevo 1914–2014,” “had not so much to do with how we view history but because [this] is a big deal in Europe.” In the exhibition, depictions of war, displacement, and destitution entered the frame only as fragments of darker chapters in the city’s history. The politics of colonialism and post-Socialist segregation, sectarianization, and segmentation in Sarajevo are all concealed under a temporal organization that designates these political projects as Austro-Hungarian, Royal Yugoslav, and Socialist Yugoslav. Absorbing and neutralizing the potential of other de/non-colonial pasts that could generate alternative social relations, the exhibition rendered the Socialist past of the city as an aberration of a singular historical narrative of imperial integration, rather than a formation in struggle against it. Imperial futures are appropriate to Sarajevo and Europe at large in a way that Socialist futures are not. The reconstruction of Vijećnica marked the end of the exhibition, characterized as a “return” to its original identity. Going over the visitors book, Merjem pointed out that almost all the visitors are tourists or diaspora returnees and that locals “are either shy or too uninterested to attend.” The following month, however, on 3 December 2016, two citizen associations, Jedan Grad Jedna Borba (One City, One Struggle) and Dobre Kote (Good Spots), under a banner reading “Vijećnica je Naša” (Vijećnica is Ours), did just that. Inside the building by the staircase they set up a Narodna čitaonica (People’s Reading Room) as a direct action to confront its takeover by the city authorities and its subsequent commercialization. In a letter serving as a call to action written by Dobre Kote on 3 December 2016 (later posted

on the organization’s Facebook page), the organizers pointed out that “Vijećnica after WWII belonged to all of us. Making it a library in 1949, the authorities of the time gave the building to all BiH society.” After half an hour, the police, together with building security staff, threw out all participants on the grounds that the “stairs are not an appropriate space for reading.”

The refusal to erase the memory of Socialist solidarities, still present in the collective struggles for social justice and public space, coincide with and are complicated by other forms of recovered colonial histories. Vijećnica has become a site on which the tensions of postcolonial and (post-) Socialist histories are continuously confronted by various movements. The reopening of another Hapsburg site, the Zemaljski Muzej, has eschewed these tensions by centering their claims on the precarious labor of the employees of the museum, foreclosing inquiries into the museum’s content or coloniality. Instead, Ja sam Muzej (I am the Museum), the movement behind efforts to reopen the museum, has sought to frame its demands around questions of preservation, while also bringing visibility to the museum as a rare cultural site that can defy the political and ethnic fragmentation of post-Dayton Bosnia and Herzegovina.⁹

9 On the political and ethnic fragmentation of BiH through the Dayton Agreement, see Chandler (2000).

Ja sam Muzej: Zemaljski Muzej and the Colonial Histories of Sarajevo

In August 2015 the Bosnian Queer performer/artist Božo Vrećo announced that the proceeds from the sale of the dress he had worn at the Sarajevo Film Festival would go to Ja sam Muzej, the initiative to reopen the Zemaljski Muzej. A grassroots initiative, Ja sam Muzej became a unifying campaign in Sarajevo. Local and international artists were invited to become symbolic *dežurni* (“people on duty”) for the museum in show of their support. In part due to indifference and in part due to the governmental arrangement of post-Dayton Bosnia, which provided no federal funding entity for cultural institutions, the museum was closed and reopened several times, and finally closed for good in 2012. Equipped with graphic design visuals, social media accounts, and YouTube videos that drew inspiration from the museum building, its history and artefacts, Ja sam Muzej produced and proliferated posters, postcards, t-shirts, and various memorabilia to promote the reopening of the museum. On its official website (jasam.zemaljskimuzej.ba) the organizers presented the museum as a crucial site “to communicate to the younger population in Sarajevo and Bosnia and Herzegovina the importance of protecting this institution and to present it as a welcoming space that is vital for the urban community.” John Holland, the CBS reporter who covered the siege of Sarajevo, in a YouTube video produced for the campaign reminded the viewers that the Zemaljski Museum was the “soul of the

nation,” adding that “a museum like this is important as without it, the city will be left in [a] vacuum and people who may want to rewrite history may influence it in a way that doesn’t do anybody any good” (“Dežuram za Muzej” 2015). The EU strongly backed the movement, funding repairs to the damage done to the museum during the war.

In April 2016, after securing funding and reopening the museum, the organizers of *Ja sam Muzej*, the NGO *Akcija*, and the museum workers received the EU Prize for Cultural Heritage at the *Europa Nostra Awards*. Satisfied with the reopening of the *Zemaljski Muzej*, on 26 October 2016, the Vienna *Naturhistorisches Museum* presented the museum with a gift of the replica of the famous “*glasinačka kulturna kolica*” (*Glasinac* cult trolley) found in *Glasinac* in 1880 and subsequently taken to Vienna. The ceremony of the handover of the replica was celebrated at *Vijećnica* on the Austrian national holiday. In November 2016, after several visits to the museum, I met with *Nebojša*, one of the coordinators of the *Ja sam Muzej* campaign at the offices of *Akcija*. While explaining the ways in which *Akcija* had approached the workers of the museum who had been working without pay, *Nebojša* pointed out that the goal of the campaign was to make the workers central to the question of reopening the museum. Meanwhile, as we discussed the videos and the promotional materials, *Nebojša* stressed that the intention was to turn the museum into a public space where people could freely express their views. As I broached the subject of the content of the museum, its colonial origins and the history narrative embodied by the museum, the conversation became somewhat strained and awkward. *Nebojša* argued the content of the museum or the museum as a site was secondary to the question of public space and workers. Asked to what extent the campaign around workers was grounded in the overall critique of post-Yugoslav privatization of public space as part of the larger Europeanization process, a critique that dominated the plenum movement, *Nebojša* quoted the Slovenian philosopher and activist *Rastko Močnik* to stress that the question was not about “fascism yes or no – but rather ‘how much fascism?’”

To *Nebojša*, my questions on the colonial nature of the museum, the decolonization of the museum, and the ways in which the museum narrates a history of Bosnia and Herzegovina as organized and displayed by the colonial regime, seemed distant from the immediate concerns facing the workers of the museum, the dissolution of the public space, and overall defunding of cultural initiatives. Correspondingly, the immediate concern was for the “museum to function” as *Nebojša* put it and for workers to get paid. Earlier in the week, I had spoken to an activist who had been involved with the reopening of the museum but who had distanced themselves with the arrival of EU funding. The activist argued “if the campaign to save the museum was centered around workers’ conditions, how do we

explain the saving of the museum by the EU while the EU contributes to those very conditions?” Perhaps this serves to illustrate how the EU, as Bjelić (2016, 3) argues, “shift[s] the ownership of its colonial histories to former colonial subjects.” Indeed, in receiving the Europa Nostra Award, the director of Zemaljski Muzej, Mirsad Sijarić, remarked: “Europeans and the European Union recognized that which the government of Bosnia-Herzegovina did not.” The EU saving the museum not only begs the question of what is there to be saved from the colonial museum, but also who else would have been its savior?

Established by the Hapsburg colonial administration of Bosnia-Herzegovina in 1888 as a cultural epicenter for the newly acquired province to collect and proliferate anthropological, archaeological, and historical knowledge production and analysis of the population of Bosnia, Zemaljski Muzej served as an educational institution aimed at forging a post-Ottoman Bosnian national identity. Like most other colonial museums, Zemaljski also collected, classified, and showcased the natural history and mineral resources of the province. It became an important tool in inventing, structuring, and synchronizing pre-Ottoman Bosnian identity with European history. Through its own periodical, *Glasnik Zemaljskog Muzeja*, the museum historicized and curated a Bosnian national identity while also creating a collective memory of an imagined shared past of all peoples living in the territory of Bosnia. In this respect, the museum was a colonial enterprise that relied on forgetting certain Ottoman pasts and linking pre-Ottoman temporalities with concurrent Austro-Hungarian projects of Bošnjaštvo,¹⁰ according to which Ottoman pasts were designated as “sites of forgetting”¹¹ (Walton 2016).

The museum was meant to make Bosnia-Herzegovina legible and to integrate it into the common map of the empire and Europe, presenting the colony to European researchers as “an Eldorado” for ethnology and anthropology (Čulić 1988, 264). While attempts were made to produce the history of the territory as historically European, there was a constant production of unsurpassable difference in the presentation of the local population as tainted Europeans whose assimilation was presented as simultaneously desirable, but impossible.

Collections of pictures and material objects from Zemaljski Muzej were frequently sent to Vienna and Budapest by the colonial administration to showcase the natives in museums and universities (Reynolds-Cordileone 2015). The colonization of Bosnia, with its large Muslim population, allowed the Hapsburg Empire to strengthen its “self-stylized” image as a “protector of Christianity in Central Europe and the Balkans” against the allegedly continued threat of an Islamic/Ottoman invasion (Ruthner 2008, 8). The bigger ambition of the Hapsburgs was to make the museum a central site for

10 For a historic overview on the making of Bosniak identity, see Hajdarpašić (2015).
 11 Although the two cases presented in this essay may not be representative of EU bias towards resurrecting the Hapsburg past at the expense of the Ottoman, it may be argued that the restoration of Ottoman-era sites destroyed during the Bosnian war of 1992–1995, such as the Ferhadija and the Arnaudija mosques in Banja Luka, were restored with local donations and

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assistance by Turkish public and private companies.

12 Jezernik (2004) draws on travellogues and historical accounts from the seventeenth century onwards to Karl Baedeker and Rebecca West, illustrating how prominent urban sites in Bosnia like the Mostar bridge were attributed Roman provenance. The Ottomans are at no point thought capable of elaborate urban-planning design and/or development. Roškiewicz (1868, 140), for instance, maintains that Roman Emperor Traian originally constructed the Mostar bridge, which was later restored by Ottoman Emperor Suleiman II, serving as an example of how these views were making the rounds well before

knowledge-gathering expeditions in Ottoman provinces further south in the Balkans such as Albania, Kosovo, and Macedonia (Kapidžić 1973, 437).

In its present-day version, Zemaljski Muzej follows an Ancient–Roman–medieval periodization (Koselleck 2004, 17). The Roman pavilion narrates a history of Bosnia from its early settlements to the arrival of Christianity. The second floor depicts medieval Bosnia along a clear and coherent narrative conveyed through objects chronicling a Bosnian Kingdom. This section takes up the largest space of the exhibition. The Hapsburgs were keen on establishing a pre-Ottoman Bosnian link to medieval Europe in general and Hungary in particular. In its exhibitions as well as in its *Glasnik* publications, emphasis was placed on the Europeanness of pre-Ottoman Bosnia-Herzegovina. A September 1894 article, for instance, which comments on a gathering of European anthropologists in Sarajevo, points out that they had arrived in the city to unearth and study the “noble and talented people who lived here who had once relied on the culture of Western Europe” (Hörmann 1894, 530) and that had it not been for the Ottoman invasion, they would have been equal to other European nations today. With establishment of the museum, the provincial colonial government is set to rectify this unfortunate history, the article notes.¹² On one of my visits to the museum, my guide Ana pointed to the *fleurs-de-lis* in King Tvrtko’s coat of arms, which was later used by the Hapsburgs as the coat of arms of Bosnia, so as to illustrate Bosnia’s relation to Europe.¹³ This specific curation of Bosnian history is not entirely irrelevant in legitimizing the present politics of EU “integration.” The medieval Bosnian exhibition ends with the capturing of Bosnia by the Ottomans. The medieval pavilion abruptly brings the exhibition space of the history museum to a close, with no account of the following four centuries of Ottoman history.

The next section of the museum, the ethnology building, houses scenes of contemporary everyday life and living conditions in Bosnia during the early Hapsburg period. An Ottoman merchant court remains the only reference to the period where the depiction of Muslim, Christian, and Jewish merchants is meant to pay tribute to interfaith coexistence in the context of Ottoman Bosnian trade.¹⁴ The Ottoman present/past is presented as frozen in time, a Hapsburg attempt to establish clearly defined temporal boundaries between the Ottoman past and the new Hapsburg forward-moving present. The importance of this temporal partition also illustrates the political tensions of the time. Part of the Muslim population in Bosnia still nurtured the idea of reunification with the Ottoman Empire (Amzi-Erdoğdular 2013). Thus, their orientation towards Vienna was tantamount to the nineteenth-century geopolitical mapping of the racial, geographic, and temporal borders of Europe that produced the Ottomans in the Balkans as an intrusion in Europe. This orientation, historicization, and subject-formation of the colonized

Hapsburg rule in Bosnia.

13 For the alleged link between Bosnia and Hungary on a representational scale, see the catalogue of the Bosnian pavilion at the 1896 Hungarian National Millennium exhibition: *Bosna i Hercegovina na Milenijskoj izložbi u Budimpešti godine 1896*. Izdanje izložbenog ureda bos.herc. Zemaljske vlade.

14 The final museum section, the pavilion on natural history, contains a detailed geological and environmental map of Bosnia as envisioned by Benjamin Kállay, a colonial administrator who insisted that in addition to culture and knowledge, the museum needed to be an economic enterprise (Dautbegović and Dautbegović 1988, 13).

15 Several interventions outside the museum have called into question the singular narrative enforced by the museum. In “Greetings from Europe,” for instance, Sarajevo artists Kurt & Plasto use a series of postcards to expose EU links to former colonial enterprises and attitudes in

population was particularly powerful given that it coincided with the emergence of biopolitical forms of governance. Bosnia-Herzegovina offered an opportunity for the Austro-Hungarian scientific establishment to test new approaches to health, sanitation, and psychology – all under the project of civilizing, ordering, and orienting the locals towards a fulfilling European life (Fuchs 2011, 58).

The seemingly harmless arrangement of time and space in the museum both produces and conceals knowledge. The centrality of medieval Bosnia as an orienting device towards Europe makes the post-Ottoman “return” to Europe an inevitability and irrevocability. The similarities between post-Ottoman and post-Socialist reconfigurations of time and space enacted by European and Balkan historiographies have sought to establish continuity with European histories concurrent to contemporary Europeanization projects that produce the merger with Europe as the preordained goal. Producing Ottoman or Socialist histories as temporary misalignments from the European linear path forecloses any possible alternative futurities. Unlike Vijećnica, however, Yugoslav authorities (both royal and socialist) did not change the colonial arrangement of the museum. This is perhaps one of the reasons that contemporary claims made about the building revolve less around the Socialist decolonial future that already was and more around European futures to come.¹⁵

One of the main difficulties in tracing the connections of colonialism and contemporary politics, Stoler (2016, 1–2) argues, is that these connections “are not always readily available for easy grasp, in part because colonial entailments do not have a life of their own” but “wrap around contemporary problems” by losing “their visible and identifiable presence in the vocabulary, conceptual grammar, and idioms of current concerns.” This becomes evident in Sarajevo, a city that has attracted little attention in colonial/postcolonial studies despite the apparent ways in which the European Union has come to claim and utilize former colonial sites and institutions in the politics of post-Socialist EU expansion. When postcolonial and post-Socialist critiques have merged, their main utility has been as a conceptual paradigm to think about the “posts” in both colonialism and socialism but not necessarily applied to the contemporary politics both “posts” have mutually engendered (Chari and Verdery 2009). Yet projects that employ memory are never hegemonic, as memory cannot be fully contained in the projects of museification; its sentiments and affects escape the coherent narratives of progressive linear European temporality. They are continuously contested by those who refuse “a view of the past as finished and the present as democratic and post-genocidal” (Haritaworn, Kuntsman, and Posocco 2014, 3).

Conclusion

continuing to treat the people of Bosnia-Herzegovina as children. In one of them, both artists pose in diapers, holding the emblem of the Hapsburgs over the Bosnian colonial chest under the inscriptions “Prinz EUgene.”

Quoting Princip’s verses “Our shadows will walk in Vienna, roaming through the palace, frightening the gentry,” the Bosnian writer and critic Muharem Bazdulj notes how he often remembers these lines when he travels to Western Europe: “In European Museums, especially in Vienna, young Bosnians and Yugoslavs, refugees from the fratricidal war, work as ticket sellers and guards of valuable art works. Late at night they drink and sing and then roam through the empty streets.” (Bazdulj 2014, 9). The instrumentalization of Vijećnica and Zemlajski Muzej to organize, contest, and confront the past while also providing a direction for the future of Bosnia-Herzegovina relies on the revival of not only physical colonial sites, but also colonial narratives. Resituating Sarajevo away from the Ottoman and Socialist pasts, the colonial Hapsburg legacy has become a pertinent and potent narrative in EU integration processes. This is perhaps why it is not unusual in the last decade to come across parallels between the EU and the Hapsburgs where the colonial past is presented as a virtuous future.

The rebuilding of Vijećnica and the reopening of Zemlajski Muzej, along with the attention and investments awarded to these postcolonial sites (all of which take place amidst the suspended sovereignty of Bosnia-Herzegovina and EU expansion demands), illustrate how the afterlife of the Hapsburg colonial civilizing project merges with the new EU missions in making Sarajevo, after Socialism and the Siege, European again. More importantly, accounts of the war and siege of Sarajevo produced during the resuscitation of these sites that depict Sarajevo as the “dark chapter of European history” and the “symbol of Europe” allow for a remaking of a European history that not only denies the colonial history of the city itself, but also delinks Europe from its larger histories of slavery, conquest, subjugation, colonialism, and racism. The tension between the Eurocentric universalist struggle for public space and a post-neoliberal world are not in opposition with decolonizing struggles, as perhaps they not need be – on the contrary, in the political movements that have emerged around these sites, they seem to be part of the same struggle. The struggle for post-neoliberal and post-European Sarajevo may just be the embodiment of Ciccariello-Maher’s (2017, 6) *counterdiscourse*, an attempt to put in motion the “radicalization of the dialectical tradition while also opening outward towards its decolonization.”

The goal of this essay is not so much to expose the hidden neo/colonial nature of the institutions, but rather to illuminate the seamlessness with which they are employed in postcolonial and post-Socialist politics of remaking Sarajevo. By directing attention to the protests and movements that are put in motion through either confronting or coopting the restoration of post-colonial sites, I aim to illuminate the politics of memory engendered by the restoration of colonial sites, but also the limits of EU integration’s appeal after

decades of post-conflict humanitarian reconstruction that has turned into a permanent state of emergency. The protests and contestations that emerged during the reopening of both Vijećnica and Zemaljski Muzej cannot be abstracted from the ways in which the EU has come to assert itself as the custodian of Sarajevo's past and present, as they are a response to the conditions created by *post-Socialist coloniality*.

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