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Bosnia and Herzegovina's Pavilion at the Venice Biennale of Art*

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1. Introduction

The economic crisis and political antagonisms of the 1980s in the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, followed by the post-Yugoslav wars of the 1990s, not only instigated human rights violations but also inevitably affected all spheres of life, including art and culture. As Milena Dragićević-Šešić and Sanjin Dragojević pointed out in their discussion of the problems faced by the cultural sector in areas experiencing turbulence during the 1990s, Bosnia and Herzegovina experienced several conditions and cultural consequences of this unrest. These included interethnic and intercultural conflict, the ghettoization of culture, forced and controlled migration, absence of social and cultural cohesion, corruption, declining professional standards, disappearance of the middle class, and destruction of cultural heritage.[1]

I argue that post-conflict, post-socialist cultural policies in present-day Bosnia and Herzegovina, characterized by nationalism and an elite culture, are detrimental for art and culture in the long term. The negative effect of these policies is visible in the history of the country's participation in the Venice Biennale of Art. The country's art and culture are caught in the nationalist matrix, and as the "rotational"[2] model of the Bosnian national pavilion exemplifies, the sector is incapable of surmounting recurrent under-funding and ethnic-based policies to escape this matrix, regardless of the quality of the

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1 Milena Dragićević-Šešić and Sanjin Dragojević, *Arts Management in Turbulent Times. Adaptable Quality Management: Navigating the Arts through the Winds of Change* (Amsterdam: European Cultural Foundation, 2005), pp. 24–27.

2 This refers to the rotation in the participation of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Republic of Srpska, the two major entities forming post-Dayton Bosnia and Herzegovina, which occurs every two years following the calendar of the Venice Biennale. A similar model was already implemented in SFRY—the republican key—as the basis for selection. This was considered problematic by the curators and art critics involved in commissioning the works. It was perceived that the best choice for selecting the artist(s) was impeded by the obligation to conform to national/republican representation. See Ana Ereš, *Југославија на Венецијанском бијеналу (1938–1990): Културне политике и политике изложбе* (Novi Sad: Galerija Matice Srpske, 2020), pp. 160–168.

proposed projects. Drawing from Milena Dragićević-Šešić's year-long research on cultural policies in Southeast and Central Europe, I base my argument on the understanding that art needs conditions that enable and nurture its propensity for experimentation. Since these pre-conditions have been systemically—and intentionally—undermined, the eventuality of surmounting such conditions becomes increasingly implausible over time. As I demonstrate, the art scene in Sarajevo, both before and during the siege, continued functioning on the premises laid down by Yugoslav socialist modernism and the country's dedicated inclusion in international artistic projects. Socialist Yugoslavia's cultural policy emphasized an international and cosmopolitan orientation,[3] and this stance shaped cultural activism during the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina in general, and the siege of Sarajevo in particular. Today, however, with the dissolution of the former Yugoslav federal state and the fragmentation of its emancipatory potential, much of the artistic scene has been absorbed by the present-day Bosnian and Herzegovinian administrative and political apparatus. What remains of old modernistic and cosmopolitan orientation is marginalized and faces circumstances that hinder its potential for positive change. By emancipatory potential, I refer to the ability of art to rejuvenate by critically engaging with cultural legacies and reflecting on existing social, political, and economic conditions. In fact, the traditional divisions between the public, private, and civil sectors—the main areas for the implementation of cultural policies—have been further complicated by their respective ethnic character and the post-socialist, post-conflict conditions of their implementation.[4]

In the first part of the paper, I outline a brief history of the participation of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia and the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia in the Biennale,[5] both of which included the territory of present-day Bosnia and Herzegovina. I then focus on Bosnia and Herzegovina, turning to the developments that led to its eventual participation in the Biennale as an independent country, including the biennial exhibition *Jugoslavenska dokumenta*, art students' group *Zvono*, and *Ars Aevi*, the Sarajevo Museum of Contemporary Art Collection project. This is followed by an analysis of Bosnia and Herzegovina's post-independence Biennale pavilions until the last participation in 2019.[6] I present a more detailed examination of the *Zenica Trilogija* project

3 Martina Böse, Brigitta Busch, and Milena Dragićević-Šešić, "Despite and Beyond Cultural Policy: Third and Fourth Sector Practices and Strategies in Vienna and Belgrade," in *Transcultural Europe: Cultural Policy in a Changing Europe,* Ulrike Meinhof, Ulrike Hanna and Anna Triandafyllidou, eds. (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), p. 134.

4 Milena Dragićević-Šešić, *Vers les nouvelles politiques culturelles: Les pratiques culturelles engagées* (Belgrade: Clio et l'Université des arts de Belgrade, 2014), p. 39.

5 Socijalistička Federativna Republika Jugoslavija (SFRJ).

6 In 2024, Stjepan Skoko's exhibition *The Measure of the Sea*, curated by Marin Ivanović, was set to represent Bosnia and Herzegovina at the 60th Biennale of Art. However, at the time of writing this paper, the selection and participation had not yet been formalized, so they could not be discussed here.

and, for this purpose, conducted an interview with one of the curators, Anja Bogojević, in November 2023. In the final section, I discuss the participation of Bosnia and Herzegovina in the Venice Biennale and its relation to memories of the war and evolving national identities of the three peoples in Bosnia and Herzegovina—Bosniaks, Croats and Serbs, which serve as determinant factors in how culture is administered in Bosnia and Herzegovina today.

As Milena Dragićević-Šešić has identified, the peripheral position of countries such as Bosnia and Herzegovina in terms of their participation in international art projects, the weakening of state cultural institutions, the neoliberal approach to the budgeting and administering of culture, and the conflict between nationalism and Europeanization have all contributed to making the already delicate position of cultural producers even more fragile.[7]

2. Yugoslavia's Participation

To understand the web of relations within which art exists in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and the different issues that therefore emerge in conjunction with present-day Bosnia and Herzegovina's participation in the Biennale, it is necessary to first examine the historical context of Yugoslav participation in the Venice Biennale.

At the Congress of Berlin—a conference of the six great European powers of the time—far-reaching decisions were made. Among others, the Congress decided that Serbia (and Montenegro) were granted full independence from the Ottoman Empire. Slovenia and Croatia remained in the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Bosnia and Herzegovina was occupied by its military forces in 1878, albeit the Ottoman Empire maintained formal sovereignity over it. In 1908, Bosnia and Herzegovina was formally annexed by the Austro-Hungarian Empire.

The first artist representing the Kingdom of Serbia in the Biennale was Croatian-born sculptor Ivan Meštrović in 1914. This was a symbolic materialization of the Kingdom's cultural policies, favoring a pan-Slavic Yugoslav identity, united through language, which emerged in Belgrade in the early 1900s. The participation of the Kingdom of Serbia in the 1914 Biennale also coincided with the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand in Sarajevo and start of the First World War.[8] The context of the assassination, executed by the youths of *Mlada Bosna* [Young Bosnia], was marked by the idea of anti-imperialism and the right to self-determination of the South Slavic nations,

7 Milena Dragićević-Šešić, "The Gaze from the Semi-periphery: Alternatives for Civil Society Development in Southeast Europe," in *Models to Manifestos: A Conceptual Toolkit for Arts and Culture (An Outcome of the Creative Lenses Project),* Sandy Fitzgerald, ed. (Dublin: Olivearte Cultural Agency, 2019), pp. 94–101.

8 Norka Mladinić Machiedo, "Prilog proučavanju djelovanja Ivana Meštrovića u Jugoslavenskom odboru," *Časopis za suvremenu povijest*, 39(1), 2007, p. 134.

which were linked by a common language. In the spirit of this pan-Slavic Yugoslav identity, the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes was established in 1918, which included the territory of today's Bosnia and Herzegovina, Northern Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia, Kosovo, Croatia, and Slovenia. In 1929, the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes was renamed the Kingdom of Yugoslavia. It lasted until 1941 when it was invaded and partioned by the Axis Powers.

In accordance with the decision of Prince Pavle Karađorđević to showcase art from the Kingdom of Yugoslavia at the Biennale in 1938 and 1940, the Yugoslav pavilion was built in 1938. This decision, which continued the propagation of merging art and politics, put the Kingdom of Yugoslavia in an ambiguous position vis-à-vis Fascist Italy. During World War II, culture—and especially high-brow art—was put on hold as conditions were extremely difficult, if not impossible, for its perpetuation. Art continued to be produced, but it was now shaped by the armed struggle for liberation and Partisan movement. The Yugoslav Communists viewed culture as an integral part of their struggle, primarily as an ideological weapon but also as a tool for social emancipation in a predominantly rural country plagued with high rates of illiteracy and poverty.[9]

The Yugoslav Communists emerged victorious in 1945, and their efforts to rebuild a devastated country, now called the Federal People's Republic of Yugoslavia, required coordinated efforts in all fields. Culture and education were prioritized as they were seen as tools for the social emancipation and development necessary to create a fair, solidarity-based socialistic society.[10]

3. Representing Socialist Yugoslavia: Cultural Cold War

In 1948, the political split between the Yugoslav Communists and the USSR, formalized by the Cominform Resolution, marked Yugoslavia's break from Soviet-style socialist realism in art and culture. In the visual arts, this shift was materialized by Petar Lubarda's exhibition of paintings in 1951. Following this break, Yugoslavia turned toward the US and the West for financial and political aid.

On the domestic plane, Yugoslavia-styled socialist self-management in the early 1950s meant not only a distancing from the USSR but also a commitment of the League of Communists of Yugoslavia (LCY) to a "liberal" society,[11] although this was never truly achieved. As Branislav Jakovljević writes, "socialist realism

9 See Ljubodrag Dimić, *Agitpropovska faza kulturne politike u Srbiji 1945–1952* (Belgrade: Izdavačka radna organizacija "Rad," 1988).

10 See Branka Doknić, *Kulturna politika Jugoslavije 1946–1960* (Belgrade: Službeni glasnik, 2013).

11 The Communist Party of Yugoslavia was renamed the League of Communists of Yugoslavia at the sixth congress of the party in November 1952. See Milovan Djilas, *Vlast i pobuna* (Zagreb: Europapress holding, Novi Liber, 2009), pp. 318–319.

as a political economy was never eliminated or replaced by a different organizational and funding model."[12]

The rapprochement with the US and other Western countries in the 1950s resulted in a faster and more pronounced Americanization and Westernization of Yugoslavia's culture. Bojana Videkanić describes Yugoslav socialist modernism as a "fusion of the socialist political project with the adoption of aesthetic, formal ideas formed in the Western modernist model."[13] Thus, during the years when Yugoslavia was reimagining socialist-style modernity, it also navigated a balancing act between the US and the USSR on the geopolitical plane. On the domestic cultural plane, in pace with rapid economic growth,[14] this translated into an acceptance of "the universalism of post-war modern culture, along with all (social) values linked to the idea of individual freedom of choice and autonomy of art."[15]

Aligned with such values, the Federal People's Republic of Yugoslavia[16] first participated in the Venice Biennale in 1950 with works by both modernists and socialist realists such as Ilić, Mujezinović, Kos, Lubarda, Augustinčić, Kršinić, Radauš, Bakić, and Angeli Radovani.[17] Yugoslavia's participation lasted until 1991.[18]

Yugoslavia's participation in the social, political, and cultural modernist project, alongside other Western countries, was intended to symbolize the progressive character of Yugoslav socialism (self-management), which could balance both "East and West" while keeping alive the idea of a nation that had liberated itself from foreign occupation (Ottoman Empire, Austro-Hungarian Empire, Axis Powers) and capitalism. According to Bojana Videkanić, Yugoslavia's nonaligned modernism represented those marginalized in the international art world.[19] While state-sponsored official art embraced modernism and abstract art in the 1950s, the 1960s and 1970s created fertile ground for the emergence of new art practices located predominantly at the margins of

12 Branislav Jakovljević, *Alienation Effects: Performance and Self-Management in Yugoslavia 1945–91* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2016), p. 11.

13 Bojana Videkanić, *Nonaligned Modernism: Socialist Postcolonial Aesthetics in Yugoslavia, 1945–1985* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2019), p. 65.

14 Dušan Bilandžić and Stipe Tonković, *Samoupravljanje u praksi* (Zagreb: Globus, 1974), p. 51 as cited in Branislav Jakovljević, *Alienation Effects: Performance and Self-Management in Yugoslavia 1945–91,* p. 12.

15 Ljiljana Kolešnik, "Konfliktne vizije moderniteta i poslijeratna moderna umjetnost," in *Socijalizam i modernost: umjetnost, kultura, politika 1950–1974,* Ljiljana Kolešnik, ed. (Zagreb: Institut za povijest umjetnosti – Muzej suvremene umjetnosti, 2012), p. 129.

16 FPRY.

17 Jerko Ješa Denegri, *Bijenale u Veneciji i jugoslavenska moderna umjetnost 1895–1988* (Galerija suvremene umjetnosti, Zagreb, June-July 1988), pp. 132–135, https://hrcak.srce.hr/file/392928 accessed on January 25, 2023.

18 FPRY did not take part in the Biennale in 1948.

19 Videkanić, *Nonaligned Modernism*, p. 9.

the official art scene and formulated as a criticism of the commodification, institutionalization, and further "embourgeoisement" of art—i.e., conceptual art—as it became gradually integrated within galleries, museums, and biennials.[20] Art historian Ivana Bago situates the work of the curators affiliated with these "marginal" institutions (*Galerija Studentskog centra* in Zagreb and *Studentski kulturni centar* in Belgrade) within Yugoslav self-managed socialism.[21] Branislav Jakovljević writes that the self-management reforms that took place in Yugoslavia in 1963 and 1965 shifted decision-making power to employees and represented a sincere attempt to reform the system in place.[22] According to Jerko Ješa Denegri, the artists' and curators' criticism of the socialist society placed the New Art Practices, a term he coined for the experimental art created in the 1960s and 1970s, within the context of social critique and activism.[23] Denegri points out that Yugoslavia's art scene from the 1980s was characterized by a multitude of smaller art scenes rather than an integral one,[24] as if this formal disintegration of art productions, according to local (and national) traditions, was foreseeing the wider disintegration of Yugoslavia herself.[25]

In her book *Југославија на Венецијанском бијеналу (1938–1990): Културне политике и политике изложбе*, Ana Ereš explains that from the mid-1960s, debates emerged about how Yugoslavia was represented at the Biennale. The Yugoslav professional public and art experts perceived that the selections did not reflect emerging trends in the country's art by which it should be presented abroad.[26] For Ereš, that period is characterized by the institutionalization of modernism and the emergence of more complex artistic tendencies.[27]

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20 Ljiljana Kolešnik, "Zagreb as the Location of the "New Tendencies" International Art Movement (1961–73)," in *Art beyond Borders: Artistic Exchange in Communist Europe (1945–1989)*, Jérôme Bazin, Pascal Dubourg Glatigny and Piotr Piotrowski, eds. (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2016), pp. 312–321.

21 Ivana Bago, "Dematerialization and Politicization of the Exhibition: Curation as Institutional Critique in Yugoslavia during the 1960s and 1970s," *Museum and Curatorial Studies Review* 2(1), 2014, pp. 7–37.

22 Jakovljević, *Alienation Effects*, p. 132.

23 See Jelena Vesić, "The Student Cultural Centre (SKC) As the Art Scene," http://tranzit.org/exhibitionarchive/essays/jelena-vesic/#_ftn3 accessed on January 25, 2023.

24 Jerko Ješa Denegri, "Jugoslovenski umetnički proctor," *Sarajevske sveske* 51, 2017, https://sveske.ba/en/content/jugoslovenski-umetnicki-prostor accessed January 25, 2023.

25 In the field of theater, Naum Panovski describes the nationalist disintegration of Yugoslavia in the 1980s as being accelerated by official and unofficial circles of governance, institutions, artists, and intellectuals. See Naum Panovski, "Prelude to a War," *Performing Arts Journal* 18(2), 1996, pp. 2–12.

26 Ereš, *Југославија на Венецијанском бијеналу (1938–1990)*, pp. 173–177.

27 Ibid. pp. 178–180.

These changes gradually led to a decentralized system,[28] with museums and galleries taking the lead in the selection and curation processes.[29] An echo of this decentralization, albeit in a different context, can be found in Bosnia and Herzegovina's participation in the Biennale from 2011, which is explored below.

Regardless of these developments, Socialist Yugoslavia participated regularly in the Venice Biennale for 40 years, from 1950 until 1990. Its participation ended in 1990 with the beginning of the country's disintegration into independent states. Consequently, Serbia inherited the Yugoslav Pavilion at the Biennale. This was due to the assumed legal continuity between Socialist Yugoslavia and the short-lived new Yugoslavia, which consisted of Serbia and Montenegro from 1991 until 2006, when Montenegro became independent. The other independent countries that emerged from the former Socialist Yugoslavia also presented their own art productions at the Biennale, although they did not participate regularly.

4. Bosnia and Herzegovina at the Venice Biennale

The Biennale serves as an important meeting place for curators, artists, prospective collectors, art professionals, academics, students, and cultural tourists, offering an opportunity to engage with the most up-to-date art production.

As Beat Wyss and Jorg Scheller write:

> As genuine hybrids, biennials form arenas not only for the interaction of artists, but also for the interaction of agents of primary and secondary art markets, of globalized capital, of cultural policies, of identity politics, of the tourist industry, and so forth. In contrast to museums with their permanent, canonical collections and their assignment to restore and to protect artifacts, temporary biennials mirror the flexible, dynamic and unstable conditions of the globalized world.[30]

In the aftermath of WWII and its exclusion from the Comintern in 1948, Yugoslavia's participation in the Biennale had been primarily political, as it was for other countries. Bojana Videkanić underlines that the artworks were also

28 Ana Ereš underlines that "in the period between 1968 and 1980, we cannot speak of the application of a certain continuously implemented form of Yugoslav presentation. Rather of a series of exhibitions that presented contemporary art from Yugoslavia in different ways, according to the interests and preferences of the commissioners and responding to the programming concepts of the Biennale. Those concepts introduced during the seventies put in place the practice of setting a new problem-themed framework for each edition of the exhibition." Ibid. p. 215.

29 Ibid. p. 182, p. 191.

30 Beat Wyss and Jorge Scheller, "Comparative Art History: The Biennale Principle," in *Starting from Venice: Studies on the Biennale*, Clarissa Ricci, ed. (Milan: et.al. / EDIZIONI, 2010), p. 52.

seen as indicative of a country's ability to fit into a postwar global narrative.[31] In the 1990s, during the Yugoslav wars and their aftermath, the political nature of participation in the Biennale was again pronounced, as the disappearance of Yugoslavia made room for the emergence of seven new national pavilions. Croatia's participation in the Biennale began in 1993, while the country was still at war, and has continued regularly since then. The Federal Republic of Yugoslavia was barred from participation in 1993 as it was under international embargo. Macedonia and Bosnia and Herzegovina were present in 1993, although Bosnia and Herzegovina's representation came through the inauguration of the Ars Aevi project, the Sarajevo Museum of Contemporary Art Collection, which was officially and in full capacity introduced to the Biennale public four years later in 1997.

In its infancy stage, the Ars Aevi collection was initiated as an individual project of one of the organizers of *Jugoslovenska dokumenta*, Enver Hadžiomerspahić. *Jugoslovenska dokumenta* was founded in Sarajevo in 1984 before the break-up of socialist Yugoslavia. It was organized in Sarajevo on only two occasions (in 1987 and symbolically in 1989) and conceptualized as a large-scale biennial exhibition of the most up-to-date Yugoslav art. For Jerko Ješa Denegri, the timeframe for Yugoslav art is between 1904 and 1989, ending with the exhibition *Jugoslovenska dokumenta* in Sarajevo.[32] According to art historian Nermina Kurspahić, the Jugoslovenska dokumenta in Sarajevo were a "testing field for the aesthetic value of socially significant visual art whose producers were insufficiently recognized culturally, critically, or socially in the country."[33] She also underlines that the particularity of the project was "articulated in its preliminary phase by three artists from Bosnia and Herzegovina: Jusuf Hadžifejzović, Radoslav Tadić, and Saša Bukvić." This is important to remember given the transformation of the field of art since then, and its current state-of-affairs, namely the marginal character of art in the context of post-conflict Bosnia and Herzegovina. According to Marko Ilić, setting the *dokumenta* apart from other large exhibitions of contemporary art in Yugoslavia as a "miracle of miracles"[34] was the fact that it was based on regional cooperation and networks among artists to provide broader visibility for them.

Writing for the second *dokumenta* catalog in 1989, Davor Matičević lamented the poor conditions for art in Yugoslavia. Matičević's comments about the

31 Videkanić, *Nonaligned Modernism*, p. 77.

32 Zoran Erić, *50 umetnika iz zbirki Muzeja savremene umetnosti: Jugoslovenska umetnost od 1951. do 1989.* (Belgrade: Muzej savremene umetnosti, 2014), p. 10.

33 Nermina Kurspahić, "Recodified Memories," in *Ars Aevi Collection: Museum of Contemporary Art Sarajevo,* Enver Hadžiomerspahić, ed. (Sarajevo: International Project Ars Aevi Museum/ Centre of Contemporary Art Sarajevo, 2006), pp. 391–393.

34 Marko Ilić, *A Slow Burning Fire: The Rise of the New Art Practice in Yugoslavia* (Cambridge, Mass and London, UK: The MIT Press, 2021), p. 283.

environment within which contemporary art in Yugoslavia was produced are interesting, as it is similar, with some degree of difference, to the current Bosnian context. Some problematic features Matičević identified in the 1980s continue to exist today in Bosnia and Herzegovina, although on a micro-scale and in a post-conflict, post-Yugoslav context. To summarize, these include a crisis of morality and economics, and no established market or proper system of commissioning.[35] He adds: "Still, this exhibition [*Jugoslovenska dokumenta*] does not alter the status of contemporary art in this society, which has not yet given it its rightful place; but both the artists and those who need art have a right to this country and art."[36]

Denegri sees the Ars Aevi project as the internationalization of *Jugoslovenska dokumenta*, which was planned to take place again in 1991 but never materialized.[37] The *dokumenta* itself can be considered as the result of several other larger exhibitions organized earlier by the Union of the Associations of Fine Artists of Yugoslavia (*SULUJ: Savez udruženja likovnih umetnika Jugoslavije*), such as "Art on the territory of Yugoslavia since Antediluvian Times" in 1972 and "Art in Yugoslavia, 1970–1978."[38] Art historian Muhamed Karamehmedović also highlights that these exhibitions and the program of the Collegium Artisticum Gallery (est. 1975), which organized more than 120 exhibitions from 1975 to 1980, put Sarajevo on an equal position with other Yugoslav cultural centers.[39] Davor Matičević makes another interesting point in his analysis of contemporary art in Yugoslavia in the 80s, painted as a decade of maturation compared to the 70s.[40] To better understand the context in which art was created in the 1970s and 1980s in Sarajevo and Bosnia and Herzegovina, it could be helpful to briefly examine the period that preceded *Jugoslavenska dokumenta*.

In his book *A Slow Burning Fire*, Marko Ilić describes Sarajevo as a culturally underdeveloped milieu compared to Zagreb (Croatia), Belgrade (Serbia), and Ljubljana (Slovenia) for several reasons. First, according to him, because of the republic's multinational composition and vulnerability to the nationalist interests of its neighboring republics, the cultural policy implemented in Bosnia and Herzegovina featured strong and repressive propaganda.[41] The belated economic development of the republic and its focus on industries based on mining also played a part in its slower cultural development. In

35 Davor Matičević, "A View of the Eighties—The Eighties—The Way to Remember Them," in *Jugoslovenska dokumenta,* Muhamed Karamehmedović, ed. (Sarajevo: Skenderija, 1989), p. 45.

36 Ibid.

37 See Ahmed Burić, Interview with Jerko Denegri, *BH Dani* 192, 2001.

38 Muhamed Karamehmedović, *Jugoslovenska dokumenta* (Sarajevo: Olimpijski centar Skenderija, 1989), p. 33.

39 Ibid.

40 Matičević, "A View of the Eighties," pp. 39–45.

41 Ilić, *A Slow Burning Fire*, p. 252.

addition, the Academy of Fine Arts in Sarajevo was not established until 1972, thus obliging students interested in studying art before 1972 to move to either Zagreb, Ljubljana, or Belgrade, where most remained after completing their studies. Once the Academy of Fine Arts was established in Sarajevo, students who had been gathering at various cafes in the city started showing their work in the early 1980s, first in the small *Zvono* [Bell] café and later in the pedestrian streets of the city center.[42] Ilić highlights the important role of *Zvono*—a group of art students (Saša Bukvić), painters (Sead Čizmić, Biljana Gavranović, Sadko Hadžihasanović, Narcis Kantardžić), and a photo-grapher (Kemal Hadžić)—in the traditionalist milieu of Sarajevo and in breaking with conservatism in art.[43] It is also interesting to consider that the development of Sarajevo's cultural milieu was influenced by developments in art in other Yugoslav cultural centers. In parallel, it also produced other forms more specific to Sarajevo and Bosnia and Herzegovina, such as the Sarajevo pop-rock scene and the New Primitives subcultural movement.[44] With the Winter Olympic Games that took place in Sarajevo in 1984, the city's infrastructural, economic, and cultural development became more propitious for creativity. Unfortunately, this period ended very soon.

With the beginning of the post-Yugoslav wars in 1991, marked by the conflicts in Slovenia and Croatia spilling over to Bosnia and Herzegovina, and with the start of the siege of its capital city Sarajevo, museums, archives, and libraries were deliberately targeted[45] along with schools and hospitals.[46]

42 Ibid., p. 259.

43 Ibid., p. 260.

44 Ibid., pp. 276–278.

45 Asja Mandić, "The Formation of a Culture of Critical Resistance in Sarajevo: Exhibitions In/On Ruins," *Third Text* 25, 2011, pp. 725–735.

46 For more detail, see the Trial Judgment (Appeal) of Stanislav Galić, Major General of the Army of the Serbian Republic (VRS) and Commander of the Sarajevo Romanija Corps (SRK). Prosecutor v. Stanislav Galić, Judgment, IT-98-29-A, November 30, 2006, https://www.refworld.org/pdfid/47fdfb565.pdf accessed November 16, 2023; *Paragraph 349:* Further, the Trial Chamber also discussed the battle damage assessment of Squadron Leader Harding, a UN Military Observer. Harding visited Koševo Hospital on 30 December 1992 to identify how damage from the attacks had affected the hospital's operation. He found that the hospital had taken direct hits by 40 m and 20 mm anti-aircraft artillery. There was also much evidence of heavy artillery fire on the hospital. None of this weaponry is of the type militaries use to take on mortars, so attacks using those weapons were not attacks against the mortars, but rather attacks on the hospital as a hospital; Paragraph 350: Finally, the Trial Chamber also heard evidence that the Minister of Health of Republika Srpska told the Republika Srpska Assembly that if the "Hospital is to end up in the hands of the enemy, I am for the destruction of the Koševo Hospital so that the enemy has nowhere to go for medical help." Though the hospital was never destroyed, this evinces a willingness to target the hospital even when there was no legitimate military purpose to doing so and is additional evidence lending credence to the conclusion beyond a reasonable doubt that the hospital was deliberately targeted.

According to Hadžiomerspahić, the idea of the creation of the Ars Aevi collection project emerged during one such targeting, namely the shelling of the Olympic Museum on April 27, 1992.[47] Like many Sarajevans, Hadžiomerspahić and his family left Sarajevo because of the war. They went to Italy, where he recreated a network of artists and curators. Through endowments from individual artists established internationally and with the support of the Italian and Venetian authorities, the Ars Aevi collection was born. The collection contains a double meaning: first, as a political act, as this project was the seed of an envisioned project, i.e., once the war ended, it would become a public museum with a strong anti-war message embedded in its birthing. Second, it immanently inscribed Sarajevo and its cultural scene as an integral part of the international mainstream art scene due to its close relationship not only with the Venice Biennale, but also with other art circles in Italy (notably the Fondazione Cittadelarte - Pistoletto in Biela) and abroad.

In 1993, the exhibition *Witnesses of Existence*—consisting of works by Pašić, Bogdanović, Walldeg, Jurić, Jukić, Numankadić, Skopljak, and Tadić, organized by Obala Art Centar Sarajevo, and commissioned by Azra Begić—was invited by the artistic director of the Biennale, Achille Benito Oliva, to be presented as a collateral event through a video presentation, since neither the artworks nor the artists were permitted to leave Sarajevo under the siege.[48] Jusuf Hadžifejzović participated in the Biennale in 1995, but within the Croatian pavilion. In 1999, at the 48th Venice Biennale, Gordana Anđelić-Galić, Amra Zulfikarpašić, Alma Suljević, and Jusuf Hadžifejzović participated in the special program Oreste. Ars Aevi was present at the 49th Biennale within the *Plateau of Humankind* exhibition, curated by Harald Szeemann, featuring the work of graphic designer Anur Hadžiomerspahić and his series of posters titled *Human Condition*, created between 1993 and 1997. The posters questioned issues that directly impacted the experience of the artist's city of birth, Sarajevo, including war and destruction, cynical manipulation, and Anur Hadžiomerspahić's own attempt to understand such violent changes from a personal perspective.[49]

Two years later, the country was again officially present at the Biennale. Once again, Ars Aevi organized the participation and facilitated all aspects of the Bosnian pavilion's promotion and visibility. The curatorial team of Ars Aevi, headed by Asja Mandić, selected four established contemporary artists: Maja Bajević, Jusuf Hadžifejzović, Edin Numankadić, and Nebojša Šerić-Šoba, whose work was exhibited at the Palatto Zorzi. In 2003, Damir Nikšić and Bojan Šarčević participated in the exhibitions *Interlude* and *Clandestine*,

47 Marta Vidal, *Ars Aevi: A Museum for Peace*, https://balkandiskurs.com/en/2015/12/23/ars-aevi-a-museum-for-peace/ accessed June 1, 2020.

48 Enver Hadžiomerspahić and Asja Mandić, *50th International Exhibition La Biennale di Venezia: Pavilion of Bosnia and Herzegovina* (Sarajevo: Ars Aevi muzej savremene umjetnosti, 2003).

49 Asja Mandić, "Anur," in *ARTEFACTS: Bosna i Hercegovina na Venecijanskom bijenalu 1993–2003,* Maja Bobar et al., eds. (Sarajevo: Ars Aevi muzej savremene umjetnosti, 2007), pp. 126–133.

respectively, both curated by Francesco Bonami.[50] Bosnia and Herzegovina did not participate in the Biennale in 2005 and 2007.

In 2009, Bosnia and Herzegovina was again absent, despite an initial invitation from the Biennale's organizers and the selection of nine Bosnian artists. That year, while the country's national pavilion was absent, Ars Aevi showcased its collection among the collateral events with Braco Dimitrijević's *Future Post History*, curated by Amila Ramović. It appeared that fractioning among the cultural elite and dissatisfaction with Ars Aevi's key role was emerging, not only concerning the question of national representation, but also regarding its influence on the choice of participating artists. This gradual lack of support for Ars Aevi's involvement became more visible in 2009 and 2011, resulting in Bosnia and Herzegovina's non-participation in the Biennale. A key year for culture in Bosnia and Herzegovina was 2010, marked by a political crisis that translated into difficulties in forming a state-level government after the general elections. The escalation of this problem turned into a crisis for former state institutions of culture, with the closure of various institutions including the Art Gallery of Bosnia and Herzegovina in 2011 and National Museum of Bosnia and Herzegovina in 2012.[51] In addition to transparency issues, one main criticism leveled at the Ars Aevi Museum of Contemporary Art Collection project was that it was receiving state funding while formally registered as a non-governmental organization. Furthermore, who had the "right" to exhibit at the Biennale was questioned. Ars Aevi officially became a public institution of Sarajevo Canton in 2017 and is now fully budgeted (and controlled) by the cantonal government. It has since been incorporated into a public institution overseeing both the Ars Aevi Museum and Olympic Museum, namely the public institution of the City Museums of Sarajevo (*Javna ustanova Muzeji Grada Sarajeva*).

In 2011, perhaps due to the history of the founding of the Ars Aevi project, its strong symbolic links to the siege of Sarajevo, its connectedness with the organizers of the Biennale, and its recurring participation in the Biennale, the Ministry of Civil Affairs (Ministarstvo civilnih poslova/MCP), whose Sector for Science and Culture is in charge of "coordinating all national representations abroad," and the Ministry of Culture of the Federation of BiH decided to intervene. Aiming to formalize and place Bosnia and Herzegovina's participation in the Biennale under administrative control, it was decided to establish a model of "equal" participation based on the entities. This entailed a selection by rotation of the two entities that compose Bosnia and Herzegovina: the Republic of Srpska (Republika Srpska/RS) and the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (Federacija Bosne i Herzegovine/FBiH). The proposed model was

50 Ibid., pp. 136–153.

51 Jasmina Gavrankapetanović-Redžić, "Culture, Memory and Collective Identities in the (Re) Making: The National Museum of Bosnia and Herzegovina," *Acta Slavica Iaponica* 39, 2018, pp. 71–90.

molded according to the politico-administrative structure (or ethnic division) of the country, as the MCP, despite being a state-level ministry responsible for international cooperation, exchange, and promotion in the domain of culture and scientific research, decided to delegate the decision making and selection of artists to lower administrative levels, i.e., to the entities.[52]

In the next section, we see how this rotational model was implemented in practice, how this decision mirrors current national fragmentation, and the consequences thereof.

5. Discussion

According to the General Framework for Peace or the Dayton Peace Agreement (ratified in November 1995), which formally ended the armed conflict in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the country is *grosso modo* divided in two: the RS (Republika Srpska) and the FBiH (Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina). In practice, this division sealed the country's separation into ethnically homogenous territories. This homogeneity had been enforced during the 1992–1995 war through systemic violations of human rights, war crimes, and massive displacement of populations. Culture and education, particularly sensitive topics due to their role in the upbringing of the younger generations of the now ethnically divided Bosnia and Herzegovina, were relegated to the administrative level of the entities. In practice, this creates another administrative difference between the RS and the FBiH. In the RS, one Ministry of Education and Culture is in charge of their respective mandates, making it a centralized structure. In the FBiH, despite the formal existence of a (central) Ministry of Culture and Sport of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (Ministarstvo kulture i sporta/MKSFBiH), the situation is different in practice. Essentially, the FBiH is partitioned into 10 cantons, each with its own Ministry of Culture and Education. Although the MKSFBiH holds nominal seniority in terms of hierarchy over the cantonal ministries, it has coordinating role, weaker powers of implementation and decision making. The 10 cantonal ministries have significantly more leverage than the MKSFBiH, because the cantonal assemblies

52 According to art historian Anja Bogojević (interview with the author on November 15, 2023), the rotational model, based on the partition established by the Dayton Peace Agreement (1995), was agreed on in 2011 by various cultural actors from the FBiH and RS, and not by the ministries. The solution was meant to resolve the deadlock situation regarding the country's international presentations and participation. Two institutions were recognized as having the capacity to commission works for international exhibitions and perform proper presentations of these selected works and artists: the Museum of Contemporary Arts of Republika Srpska (Banja Luka) and Art Gallery of Bosnia and Herzegovina (Sarajevo).

directly budget and administer culture via their respective ministries.[53] Furthermore, each canton often has either a Croat or Bosniak majority, which directly impacts the decision-making process of the cantonal Ministries of Culture and Education and their implementation of cultural and educational policies (e.g., textbooks for history, language, and geography).

The year 2013 is interesting for our exploration of the topic of cultural policies in Bosnia and Herzegovina because it shows: a) the "rotational" entity model applied for the first time, and b) the importance of cultural networks in the ongoing war of position among the intelligentsia (cultural workers, cultural intermediaries). As noted by Böse, Busch, and Dragićević-Šešić,[54] the narrative of civil society is not necessarily only a positive one. Under the guise of an emancipatory endeavor, civil society might instead contribute to masking the unequal character of the society in which they are operating.

In 2012, the Museum of Contemporary Art of Republika Srpska (Muzej savremene umjetnosti Republike Srpske/MSURS) in Banja Luka was chosen as the institution to select and curate the work of the artist(s) that would represent Bosnia and Herzegovina at the Venice Biennale in 2013. The curatorial team of Sarita Vujković and Irfan Hošić invited Mladen Miljanović and his "*Garden of Delights*" to represent Bosnia and Herzegovina at the 55th Biennale of Art. Furthermore, Ars Aevi marked the 20th anniversary of its collection and simultaneously exhibited the "Ars Aevi Collection in Progress 1993–2013" at the Arsenale. Its invitation read:

> In 1993, the first year of the siege of the Olympic city of Sarajevo, during the opening of the 45th Venice Biennale, an invitation was sent out into the world from Venice with which Sarajevo called upon the artists of the world to contribute their works to form the Ars Aevi Museum Collection of their future World Contemporary Art Museum in Sarajevo. In the two-decades-long process of formation of this unique collection, artistic directors of renowned European museums, centres and foundations took on the role of organisers of founding exhibitions where artists of the world presented and donated their representative works to Sarajevo. Recognising the Ars Aevi Project as an ethical expression of international collective will, the famous architect Renzo Piano, a UNESCO Goodwill Ambassador, presented Sarajevo with his architectural designs for the Ars Aevi Museum.[55]

53 One example here is Sarajevo Canton. In 2022, its annual budget was 1,220,787,840 KM (approx. 624,178,911.23 euro). For comparison, the 2022 budget of RS was 4,427,000,000 KM (approx. 2,218,000,000 euro), while FBIH's budget was 5,597,619,000 KM (approx. 2,798,809,500 euro). The question of the redistribution of taxes through the state level, primarily those collected through VAT (which amounts to 17%), is a fierce political issue. This echoes similar problems in SFRY. See Vladimir Gligorov, "Yugoslavia and Development: Benefits and Costs," in *Yugoslavia from a Historical Perspective.* Latinka Perović et al., eds. (Belgrade: Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Serbia, 2017), pp. 409–441.

54 Böse, Busch, and Dragićević-Šešić, "Despite and Beyond Cultural Policy," p. 133.

55 Ars Aevi invitation, "Venice embraces artists of the world," Arsenale, May 28–November 24, 2013, http://www.diogenpro.com/uploads/4/6/8/8/4688084/poziv_za_izlozbu_ars_aevi.pdf accessed May 21, 2020.

This short excerpt emphasizes the legacy of the war in the establishment of the Ars Aevi Museum Collection. It also connects its origins to the Olympic past of Sarajevo and the European character of the city. The formal and informal networks established by Ars Aevi, particularly abroad, echo similar situations as described by Milena Dragićević-Šešić regarding NGOs working across post-Yugoslavia.[56] These non-governmental, unofficial networks are important as they enhance communication and facilitate presentation and recognition, both abroad and in domestic contexts, especially when the number of NGOs working in the field of (contemporary) art has been diminishing over the years.[57] However, they can also be perceived as being biased toward one actor over another, despite or perhaps because of the well-established international networks facilitating their work, as the gradual marginalization of Ars Aevi between 2004 and 2011 shows.

In his text accompanying Mladen Miljanović's *Garden of Delights*, art historian Irfan Hošić argues that the failure of Bosnia and Herzegovina to appear at the Venice Biennale for the past 10 years [*before 2013*] must be considered in any examination of the situation of the local culture and art.[58] Ars Aevi's presence in 2009 with Braco Dimitrijević's *Future Post History* and again in 2013 is, perhaps understandably, not considered a presentation to mention since it did not fall within the official national representation. In fact, Ars Aevi, *dokumenta*, and Zvono are not mentioned in Hošić's text. The reference to Sarajevo's art scene is mostly referred to as rigid (socialist realism) and academism. Mladen Miljanović is a Zenica born artist living and working in Banja Luka, who before studying painting, attended the Reserve Officer Military School and worked at a tombstone workshop. Miljanović's Garden of Delights references Hieronymus Bosch's 15/16th century triptych "The Garden of Earthly Delights," tombstone engravings the artist collected throughout the Balkans, and the pervading kitsch embodied in the gendered[59] and vulgar flamboyance of turbo-folk music, whose emergence coincides with the rise of nationalism since the 1980s.[60] Through the ironic presentation of such

56 Milena Dragićević-Šešić, "Informal Artists NGO Networks: Reintroducing Mobility in the Region of South Eastern Europe," in *Mobility of Artists and Cultural Professionals in South Eastern Europe,* Dimitrije Vujadinović, ed. (Belgrade: Balkankult fondacija, 2009), pp. 127–130.

57 Ibid., p. 128.

58 Irfan Hošić, *Mladen Miljanović. The Artist and the Issue of Context* (Catalogue of the Pavilion of Bosnia and Herzegovina at the 55th Venice Biennale) (Banja Luka: Museum of Contemporary Art of Republika Srpska, 2013), p. 55.

59 Zlatan Delić, *Turbo-folk zvijezda: konstruiranje ženskog subjekta u tekstovima/pjesmama Lepe Brene, Sveltane Cece Ražnatović, Severine Vučković i Jelene Karleuše* (Sarajevo: Šahinpašić, 2003).

60 Uroš Čvoro, *Turbo-folk Music and Cultural Representations of National Identity in Former Yugoslavia* (London: Routledge, 2016).

popular cultural references, Hošić reads in Miljanović's work as a criticism of the political class. Turning toward the description of the context in which Miljanović's work was created, Hošić emphasizes the importance of Banja Luka as a cultural center,[61] which he depicts as more open to experimentation, and of the Academy of Fine Arts Banja Luka, which, unlike its Sarajevo counterpart, is unburdened by academic legacy. Similarly, the inversed trope of (Eastern) barbarians and fascists is used in the depiction of Serb troops encircling Sarajevo during the siege.[62] Conversely, those who emphasize the importance of the arts and culture scene in Sarajevo often refer to its European character. Given the theme of this paper, it is interesting that within this text, Hošić finds it necessary to underline that the prominence of Banja Luka's art scene compared to other cities,[63] particularly Sarajevo, can be attributed "to its geographical proximity to the West, as well as the traditional, centuries-long urban mentality of its local population." Alongside the nesting Orientalisms contained in the trope equating modernity with the West,[64] social stratification according to the urban/rural divide is also present in Hošić's text, with progressive (urban) in opposition to backwards (rural). In addition, although the text contains criticisms of the current situation regarding culture, there is no reference to administrative or political obstacles.

In 2015, the MCP delegated the commission of the Biennale artists to the Art Gallery of Bosnia and Herzegovina (Umjetnička galerija BiH/UGBiH). However, as one of the seven (former) state institutions of culture, the UGBiH was facing serious administrative and financial problems itself.[65] Consequently, it proposed only one project to the MCP: theater director Haris Pašović's work "Hope" on the Srebrenica genocide and the issue of missing persons in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The possibility of Haris Pašović's participation in the Biennale also sparked a debate among cultural workers/intermediaries in the FBiH, especially in Sarajevo, regarding who should be entitled to represent the country since no institution openly supported the proposal. The project

61 Hošić, *Mladen Miljanović*, p. 58.

62 Jasmina Gavrankapetanović-Redžić, "Enjoy Sara-jevo: Coca-Cola, Material Culture and the Siege of Sarajevo," *Third Text* 175, 2022, p. 92.

63 Hošić, *Mladen Miljanović*, p. 57.

64 Milica Bakić-Hayden, "Nesting Orientalisms: The Case of Former Yugoslavia," *Slavic Review* 54(4), 1995, pp. 917–931.

65 Jasmina Gavrankapetanović-Redžić, "Cultural Capital in Times of Crisis: The Fragmentation of Sarajevo's Post-war Cultural Elite," *Southeastern Europe* 43(2), 2019, pp. 1–26.

never reached Venice.[66] Although the rotational model helped overcome the issue of the formality of the country's participation, according to art historian Aida Abadžić Hodžić,[67] who supported Pašović's proposal, it also created a "bipolarity" between Sarajevo and Banja Luka, while cultural institutions from other cities were being excluded.

After a pause of four years, in 2017, it was the turn of the Museum of Contemporary Art of the Republika Srpska, which commissioned the work of Radenko Milak, "The University of Disaster," in collaboration with Roman Uranjek.[68] On this occasion, Milak proposed a collaboration with several international artists. While mostly known for his aquarelles representing fragments of archival documents and photographs, Milak's performance was a collaborative endeavor characterized by a dialogue between different media, with artists from different backgrounds examining human-made and natural disasters. In contrast to the Bosnian pavilion at the 55th Biennale, an attempt was made to overcome the issue of nationalism and representation inherent to the Biennale by thinking of a universal topic—disasters—through art.[69]

Zenica Trilogy

Aligned with the rotational model in place, the MKSFBiH published a call for proposals in April 2018, which defined the criteria for submissions and selection of the commissioner for Bosnia and Herzegovina's pavilion at the 58th Venice Biennale of Art. To be eligible, applicants had to be "art historians, curators, critics, artists or teams of artists and curators, cultural institutions and

66 With all these problems merging and the date for an official selection approaching, a debate was organized in March 2015 by the Association of Artists of Bosnia and Herzegovina (*Udruženje likovnih umjetnika Bosne i Hercegovine*) titled *Ko otima umjetnost umjetnicima?* (Who is stealing art from artists?). In 2015, it was the turn of the FBiH to organize the national participation. Since the Art Gallery of Bosnia and Herzegovina declared it did not have the financial means or manpower to handle such a large and demanding project, other interested parties emerged. Among these was the theater director Haris Pašović. Paradoxically, the main issue identified by various cultural actors was the fact that his proposal was not considered to be in the field of fine arts. See "Protest likovnih umjetnika: Naš najveći problem je što nas nema u strankama i politici" Klix, https://www.klix.ba/magazin/kultura/protest-likovnih-umjetnika-nas-najveci-problem-je-sto-nas-nema-u-strankama-i-politici/150320049 accessed November 25, 2023.

67 Abadžić Hodžić, "Venecijanski bijenale. Novonastala situacija je okidač za moguću promjenu," *Oslobođenje, KUN,* March 26, 2015, pp. 32–33.

68 Curated by Fredrik Svensk, Sinziana Ravini, Anna van der Vliet, and Christopher Yggdre in collaboration with Hans Ulrich Obrist. Invited artists: Roman Uranjek, Sidsel Meineche Hansen, Juan-Pedro Fabra Guemberena, Loulou Cherinet, Lamine Fofana, Geraldine Juárez, Joel Danielsson, Nils Bech, Ida Ekblad.

69 Frederik Svensk, *University of Disaster*, La Biennale di Venezia / The 57th International Art Exhibition. Pavilion of Bosnia and Herzegovina, 2017, https://gupea.ub.gu.se/handle/2077/54845 accessed January 26, 2023.

other creators from the FBiH." One criterion also required that the applicant(s) was working and/or living in the FBiH.[70]

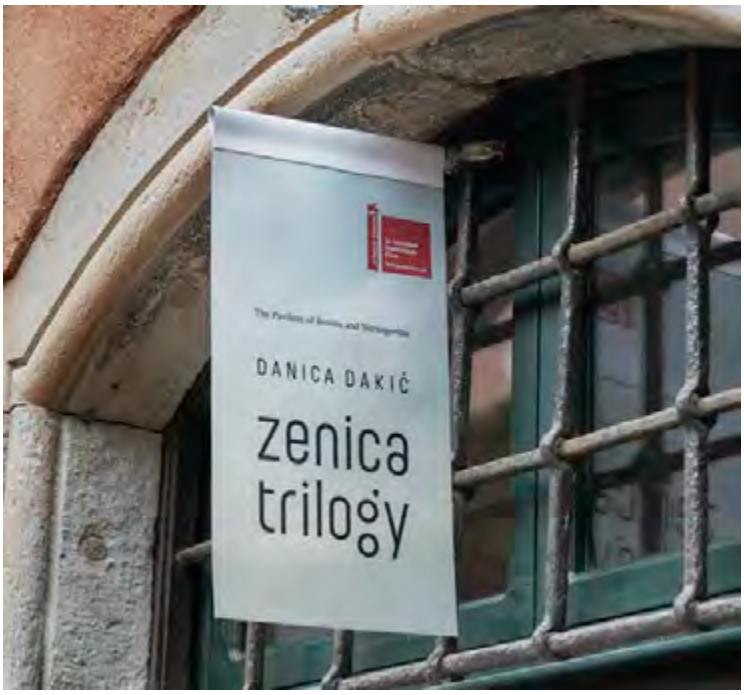

Photo 1
Danica Dakić, *Zenica Trilogy*, Bosnia and Herzegovina's pavilion at the 58th Venice Biennale of Art © Egbert Trogemann

For the 2019 Biennale, the Ars Aevi Museum of Contemporary Art Sarajevo, by then a public institution, commissioned the work of Danica Dakić, "Zenica Trilogy."[71] Curated by Amila Puzić, Anja Bogojević, and Claudia Zini, Dakić's Trilogy centers on the city of Zenica, once a developed industrial city north of Sarajevo, now struggling with high rates of unemployment and pollution from its privatized steel plant. Dakić, Puzić, and Bogojević had previously collaborated on the project *Bauhaus Goes South-East Europe* (2013), implemented by the Bauhaus-Universität Weimar, Džemal Bijedić University in Mostar, the Academy of Fine Arts in Sarajevo, and the Faculty of Fine Arts in

70 These criteria would be amended in subsequent years. See the most recent call for proposals: https://www.fmks.gov.ba/hr/javni-poziv-za-izbor-povjerenika-kustosa-paviljona-bosne-i-hercegovine-bijenala-suvremene-umjetnosti-u-veneciji-2024-godine-20-travanj-24-studeni-2024-godine/ accessed November 25, 2023.

71 Commissioned by Senka Ibrišimbegović. Curated by Anja Bogojević, Amila Puzić, and Claudia Zini. The Zenica Trilogy was realized with protagonists from Zenica and Sarajevo — Zoran Glogovac, Adil Safić, Ismet Safić, and Amila Terzimehić. The project was executed in collaboration with photographer Egbert Trogemann, producer Amra Bakšić Čamo, and composer Bojan Vuletić.

Belgrade.[72] As they had previously worked together and valued her work, Puzić and Bogojević decided to approach Danica Dakić. According to Bogojević, Dakić was just starting a new project, which they submitted as a proposal. The decided-on title was *Zenica trilogija* (Zenica Trilogy). Both the artist and curators were conscious that the choice of naming the art work after the city of Zenica could be perceived negatively for two reasons: it was not Sarajevo-centered and because of the socialist past and working-class connotations associated with the place. However, regardless of how negative the connotations, the title reflected the choice to engage with difficult and important social topics, which Dakić deals with throughout her work.

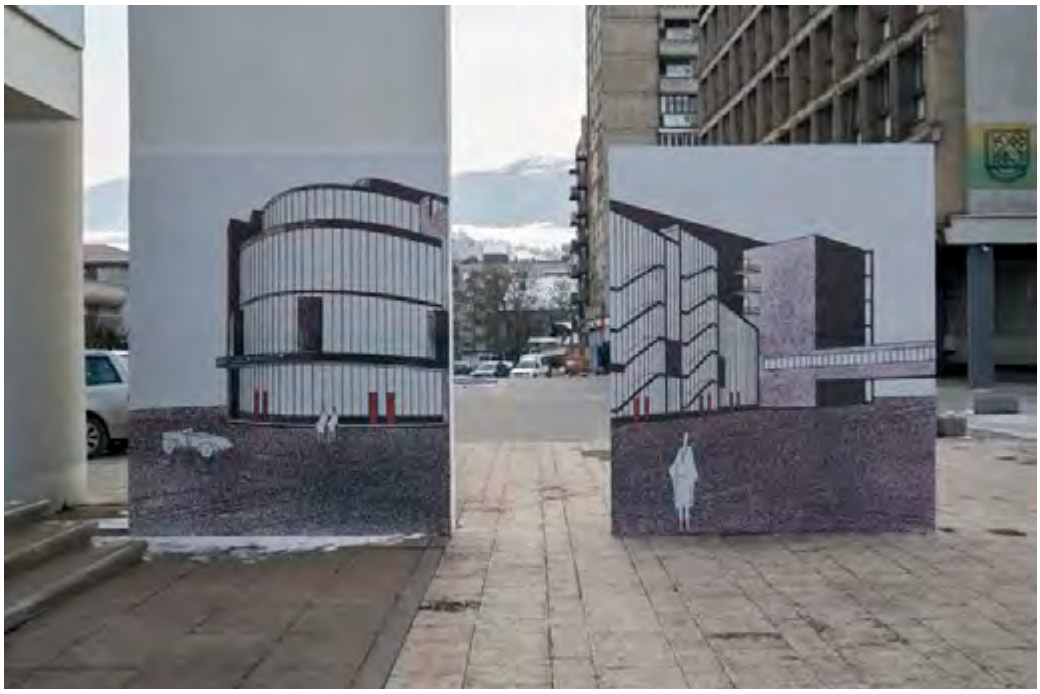

Photo 2
Danica Dakić, *Zenica Trilogy* © Egbert Trogemann, 2018

Born in Sarajevo and living and working between Sarajevo and Dusseldorf, Dakić primarily focuses on video in her work. For the Biennale, she produced three video works: "Cleaner," "Building," and "Stage," and a series of graphics, "The Zenica Map." As Bogojević and Puzić note,[73] Dakić's "art practice moves

72 The project was part of the Bauhaus-Universität Weimar MFA program Art in Public Art and New Artistic Strategies, funded by the DAAD (Deutscher Akademischer Austausch Dienst) Foundation.

73 Anja Bogojević and Amila Puzić, *Zenica Trilogy: Danica Dakić*, texts by Ulrike Bestgen, Dunja Blažević, Ana Bogojević, Amila Puzić, Senka Ibrišimbegović, Ana Janevski, Xenia Schürmann, Claudia Zini, Anja Bogojević and Amila Puzić, eds. (Museum of Contemporary Art ARS AEVI Sarajevo, 2019), p. 57.

within heterogeneous subgenres of participatory, contextual, collaborative, and performing arts." Dakić touches on several topics intrinsically linked with Bosnia's socialist past: post-WWII urbanization and modernization, Zenica's post-socialist landscape, the paradigm shift in relation to the cultural heritage of Yugoslavia, status of culture today, and precarity that shapes life in post-transition. Just as the boundaries between the media and narratives used by her are blurred, so too is Dakić's own displacement between past and present, and between being in Bosnia and being abroad. Furthermore, in the accompanying text, Bogojević and Puzić highlight the link between Dakić's work as an artist with their own experience as curators:

> On a metalevel, "The Stage" also examines the institution of theater, written in the body politics of the main protagonist. The issues of enduring and persevering are a pervasive feature of the Bosnian and Herzegovinian post-Dayton reality, and especially of culture and art. To persevere and survive in the field of culture in Bosnia and Herzegovina means to keep working in spite of systemic problems and the uncertainty of precarity. The video is also a reminder of the fact that the sphere of culture and art is not only related to intellectual and spiritual, but also to hard, dedicated, and disciplined physical work.[74]

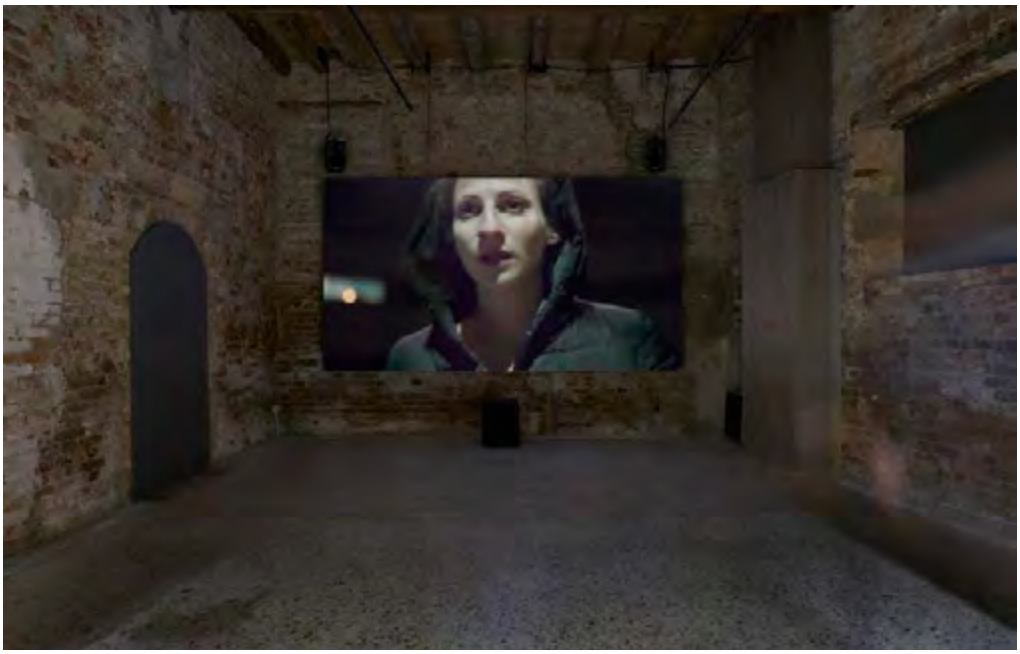

Photo 3
Danica Dakić, *Stage* (video 18' 51'' with Amila Terzimehić), Bosnia and Herzegovina's pavilion at the 58th Venice Biennale of Art © Egbert Trogemann

74 Bogojević and Puzić, *Zenica Trilogy: Danica Dakić*, p. 70.

From a four-year distance, Bogojević defines her experience of curating the national pavilion at the Venice Biennale as an enriching but difficult experience. The project's proper and timely implementation was dependent on funding from the MKSFBiH and the MCP. MKSFBiH oversaw the financing of charges such as honoraria, transport fees, the catalog, and so on. The MCP, on the other hand, was solely responsible for the pavilion and associated fees. Since Bosnia and Herzegovina does not have a permanent pavilion, it was left to the curators and commissioner to find a suitable space to exhibit Dakić's work. Besides limited financial resources,[75] technical requirements regarding transport, the rental of the pavilion, and setting up of the exhibition, another major issue was the deadline for payment of the various fees. Because of Bosnia and Herzegovina's quasi permanent state of crisis, state level funding—specifically from the Council of Ministers of BiH (Vijeće ministara BiH)—was often decided in the last days of fiscal year, which is in December.

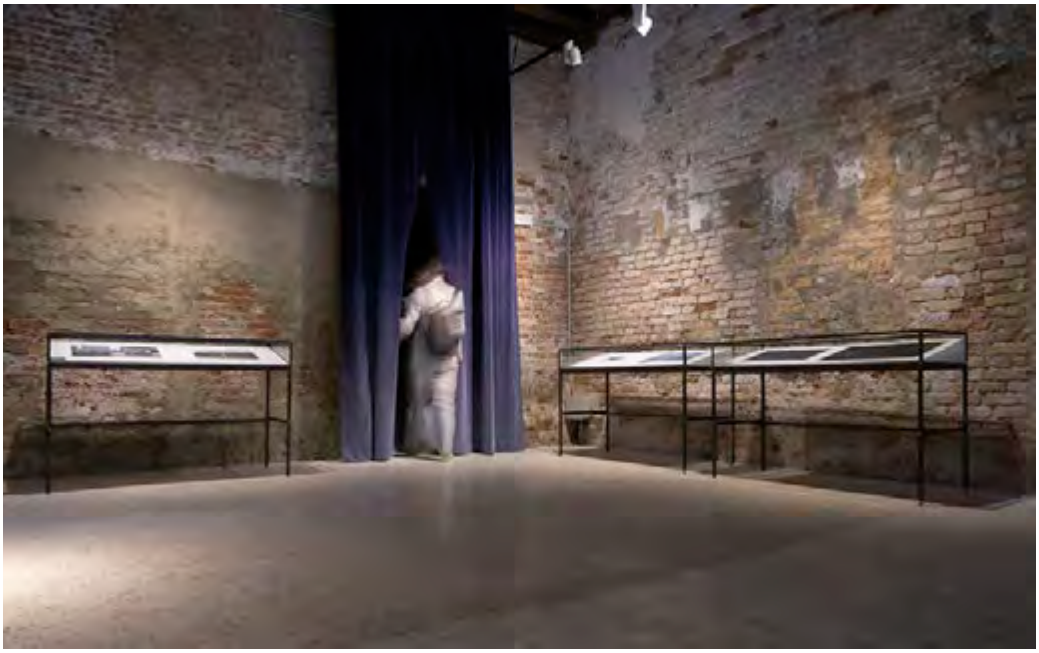

Photo 4
Danica Dakić, *Zenica Trilogy*, 58th Venice Biennale of Art © Egbert Trogemann, 2019

As Bogojević notes, all their work could have been for nothing if the deadline for national participation,[76] as established by the Biennale administration, had not been met by the Bosnian authorities. A similar problem emerged in 2021, and the Museum of Contemporary Arts of RS was prevented from participating

75 Curators and commissioners were expected to find private sponsorships.
76 Set on January 19, 2024.

in the 59th Biennale in 2022 for the same reason. Consequently, every project can face potential cancellation due to administrative, political and ultimately financial obstructions that occur for various reasons, not necessarily in relation to the national participation in the Biennale. In these situations, the national pavilion becomes collateral damage of day-to-day political agendas.

Visibility was another issue identified by Bogojević. She explains that, apart from private contact with journalists, major domestic newspapers and outlets mostly ignored the country's participation in the Venice Biennale.

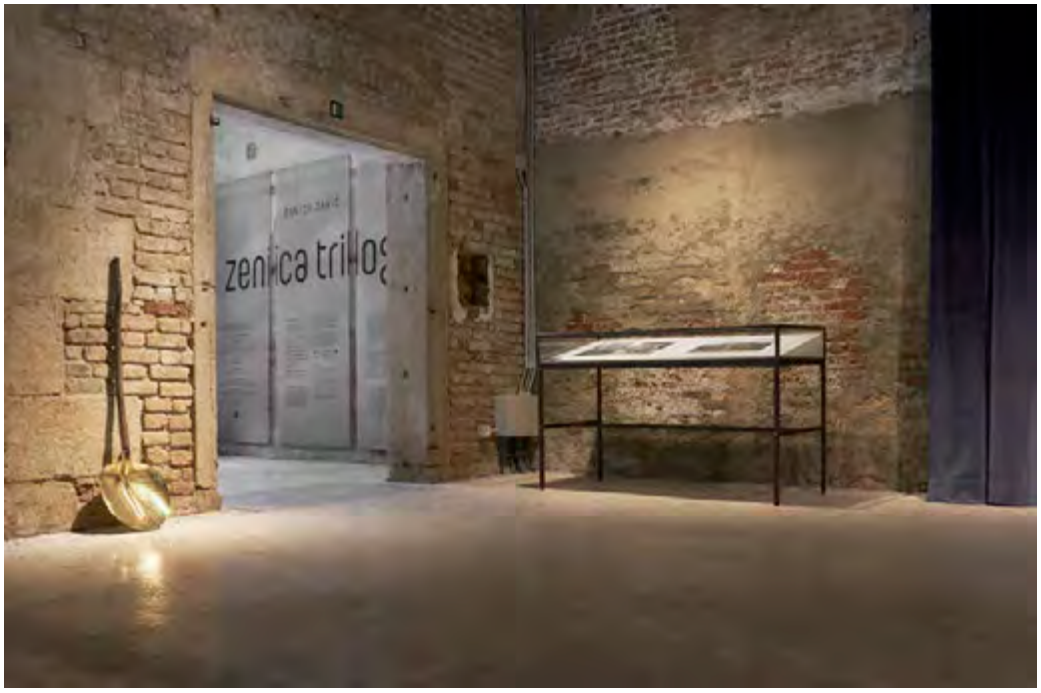

Photo 5
Danica Dakić, *Zenica Trilogy*, Interior of Bosnia and Herzegovina's Pavilion at the 58th Venice Biennale of Art © Egbert Trogemann, 2019

Bogojević attributes this quasi-invisibility to several overlapping difficulties: Ars Aevi, which had transitioned to a public institution the previous year, was already facing its own problems, and the pavilion lacked sufficient public relations support and financial and human resources. These factors collectively hindered the pavilion's visibility within Bosnia and Herzegovina's public space.[77] Another important aspect regarding the status of contemporary art in Bosnia and Herzegovina in general, and Sarajevo in particular, is the question

77 A similar situation was described by artist Vladimir Nikolić, who represented Serbia at the 59th Venice Biennale with "Walking with Water." See "Vladimir Nikolić: Hteo sam da odustanem od Venecije," *Vreme*, April 27, 2022.

of (non-existent) permanent exhibition space. This issue continues to affect Ars Aevi as its museum was never physically built.[78]

6. Conclusion

In this paper, I have attempted to provide an overview of the presentations of the Bosnian and Herzegovinian national pavilion at the Venice Biennale of Art. The historical legacy of the Yugoslav path to modernization, its policy of openness toward the East and West, and the country's participation in modern art exhibitions from the 1950s was complicated by the republican key (*republički ključ*) or national quotas meant to ensure equal representation. Present-day Bosnian and Herzegovinian cultural policies continue exhibiting similar features, which are additionally marked by post-conflict ethnocentrism, a weakened civil society, and dominant nationalistic elites. With Yugoslavia's implosion in the 1990s, the new post-Yugoslav "nation" states surged to separate, through violence, the different nations that had constituted Yugoslavia with the "reconstruction" of boundaries. Given the brutal character of the post-Yugoslav wars and peculiar role culture (and education) played and continues to play in sustaining social and political fragmentation, the idea of a national art pavilion at an international or transnational exhibition such as the Venice Biennale is not without paradox.

However, as Wyss and Scheller write:

> The assembly of pavilions does not provide insight into the "nature" or "essence" of nations, but rather into the manifold ways of constructing, inventing and representing concepts of (inter-, trans-) national or (inter-, trans-) cultural identities via inclusion or exclusion, rapprochement or distancing.[79]

The problems piling up in the cultural sector since the end of the armed conflict in Bosnia and Herzegovina in 1995 mainly show policymakers' lack of grasp of real, everyday issues and the difficulties in implementing policies given the existing complex administrative structure, quasi-permanent under-funding, and fracture between nationalist rhetoric and openness toward Europe. On one hand, present-day cultural policies are marked by the *laissez-faire* attitude of policymakers. On the other, the diminishing of financial support has provided an impetus toward a discourse promoting a market-oriented culture. The difficult transition of the culture of Bosnia and Herzegovina from being state-funded to existing in legal and financial limbo is not an isolated case, as extensively documented by the work of Milena Dragićević-Šešić on cultural policies in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe. The two-fold,

78 Similarly, the Sarajevo Centre for Contemporary Art (SCCA) never had its own exhibition space. Although the SCCA functioned from 1997 to 2015, the question of its legacy's permanency is something worth examining as a separate question.

79 Wyss and Scheller, "Comparative Art History: The Biennale Principle," p. 53.

essentially contradictory aims of cultural policies during transition, which can also be applied to our example,[80] are: "a) identity-related questions (insistence on national traditions and exploration of the past) and b) the need to integrate into the world (ending isolation and introducing civil society values and European values)."

As the case of the Bosnian pavilion at the Venice Biennale of Art exemplifies, the vacuum left by policy decisions is filled by the cultural elite, most successfully by those close to the governing (nationalist) elite. Since the end of the war, the cultural elite and (remnants of) civil society of Sarajevo and Banja Luka, as representatives of the entities' cultural scenes, are those attempting to fill the gap left by the absence of implementable policies. However, even when well-intended, such attempts at reenergizing art and culture end up either absorbed by the administrative and political apparatus, which is essentially ethnic-oriented, or simply discarded.

Through the topic of the Bosnian pavilion at the Venice Biennale, I have attempted to show that Bosnia and Herzegovina's participation in the Biennale amalgamates issues of nationalism and elite culture. Sarajevo and Banja Luka, through their concentration of cultural producers and cultural institutions, are representative of such a cleavage between elite culture and nationalism, reflecting the existing administrative ethnic-based division and post-conflict, post-socialist cultural policies established following the Dayton Peace Agreement.

However, the primary question raised by the Bosnian Pavilion at the Venice Biennale of Art is not who should be representing Bosnia and Herzegovina, a socially and politically fragmented country, but rather if the work produced and selected can be perceived by local audiences as having value outside the national matrix. The main danger arising from the current state is that what falls outside this matrix remains mostly invisible to the public. Therefore, no matter the quality of the work displayed, apart from a small group of artists and cultural workers, the majority, who are engaged in everyday survival, do not have the luxury to be able to even acknowledge its existence.

Furthermore, regarding the question of Bosnia and Herzegovina's participation within Sarajevo, the Banja Luka poles result in a blind spot that does not acknowledge the fluidity of boundaries, not only within Bosnia and Herzegovina, but also within its global diasporas. Two issues can be identified with such bipolarization: First, the nesting Orientalisms that are perpetuated through tropes of Europeanization as modernization and progress, which depicts the "other" as opposite to progress and civilization. Second, the understanding of Southeastern Europe and Balkans as a periphery, whose art is a mere belated reflection of art produced in the center. Writing about "Eastern art" as a field that emerged after the end of Cold War, Miklavž Komelj emphasizes that with the disappearance of Yugoslavia in the 1990s and the boundary between "West" and "East," Yugoslavia or its former territories

80 Dragićević-Šešić, *Vers les nouvelles politiques culturelles*, pp. 29–36.

became the "East."[81] This retroactive understanding of that space as being Eastern, while it in fact opposed the bipolar division of the world and birthed the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), is interesting on several levels. For Komelj, "when one tries to appear Western, this means that they understand themselves as being in the East (…)."[82] While Komelj primarily references art produced in the 1980s and 1990s in Slovenia, such as Neue Slowenische Kunst (NSK), it is nevertheless necessary to keep this in mind when looking at current conditions in Bosnian art. Therefore, it is not only a question of the East/West dichotomy or center/periphery dynamics. Furthermore, the nationalist matrix, oblivious to the racialized and gendered context in which art is produced in Bosnia and Herzegovina, continues to dominate. Whilst some exceptions such as Danica Dakić's *Zenica Trilogy* attempt to address the fluidity of boundaries between genres, media, participation, and interaction, it must be stressed that Dakić's own experience is one of displacement and diaspora.

81 Miklavž Komelj, "Uloga oznake 'Totalitarizam' u konstituisanju polja 'Istočne umetnosti'," *Sarajevske sveske* 32/33, 2015, https://sveske.ba/en/content/uloga-oznake-"totalitarizam"-u-konstituisanju-polja-"istocne-umetnosti" accessed January 23, 2023.

82 Ibid.