Remembrance of the Ottoman Heritage in Serbia

A Field Study at the Ethnographic Museum in Belgrade

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The first time I was in Belgrade was in September 2008, shortly after Radovan Karadžić had been handed over to The Hague tribunal and every day in the city center nationalists gathered and marched the streets in protest over his extradition. Second time I returned was in 2009 and this time I planned to visit the National Museum, but it was closed at the time due to refurbishment. In 2012 the museum’s permanent exhibition is still closed for visitors and has been during the last nine years. It seemed odd to me at the time that one of the central national institutions had been closed for such a long time in a country where national identity and history have occupied the main stage in the political arena during the last 20 years. This study is a result of an interest in getting a better understanding of the mechanisms between history and memory and the relationship between them in a country where history has been constructed and reconstructed in a profound manner since the socialist regime under Tito.

I would first and foremost give a warm and thanks to all the curators at the Ethnographic museum who were willing to contribute in this study. A warm and special thanks to my supervisor Jelena Spasenić and to Gabriela Welch for help and responses. I would also like to thank Ljiljana Gavrilović for her help and responses together with the help in establishing contact with the museum. Without her help I might not have been able to perform this study. Thank you to Yugoslav Pantić for help with translation. And at last a special thanks to my aunt, Trine, for the love and support throughout the writing process.

1 “A newer Muslim House” in Peć, Kosovo. The picture is taken in 1934 is included with the courtesy of the Ethnographic Museum.
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CHAPTER ONE

1.0. Introduction

The Imaginary Turk remains a resident of different mental spaces in Serbia. His residence can be traced in political discourse, in the cultural milieu, but also in everyday life, which is rich of various traces of centuries of Ottoman rule in most of the Balkan Peninsula.¹

The Ottoman domination in the Balkans has been perceived as the “Dark Ages” in the history of the region and is known as the “Ottoman yoke”.⁵ The Ottomans, or maybe more popularly, “the Turks”, succeeded the Eastern Roman Empire “Byzantine” and held much of the Balkan lands under its control from the fourteenth century to the very twentieth century. (see map 1 in the appendix.) The Ottomans introduced Islam to the Balkans which led to religious conversions and thus had a severe impact on the culture and ethnical composition in the region.⁶ As a consequence of the Islamic rule, much of the Balkan population did not come to share historical experiences such as the Renaissance and the Enlightenment together with the rest of Europe.⁷ Although the region once hosted one of Europe’s most ancient Christian civilizations and Hellenic traditions, the Ottoman Islamic domination in the Balkans came to represent the “Orient” in Europe which has commonly been understood as a cultural and geographic category which contrasted to everything “European” or “Western”. A common perception of the Ottoman legacy in the Balkans, therefore, is that the Ottoman invasion hindered the Balkan states to prosper and reach their Western European potential, since the “backward” Turks during the last centuries of their rule staggered behind the developments in Europe.⁸

The negative portrayal of Ottoman legacy as an alien imposition on the Christian medieval Balkan states has characterized much of the Western and Balkan literature covering the history and developments of the region. What continues to be somewhat of a puzzle, however, is how simplistic and questionable representations of history continue to prevail in the societies while more nuanced and alternative interpretations remain absent.

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³ Dennis P. Hupchick, The Balkans – From Constantinople to Communism (New York: Palgrave Macmillian, 2002), 151.
⁴ Hupchick, The Balkans, 13.
⁵ Maria Todorova, Imagining the Balkans, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 136.
In this study I will provide a further insight into a complex, and I believe, persistent part of the Serbian society, namely the continuous historical oblivion towards the Ottoman past and the negative stereotypes connected with “the Turks”, a term which during the war in the nineties also meant Bosnian Muslims.\(^9\)

The study analyzes the remembrance and exhibition of Ottoman heritage at the Ethnographic Museum in Belgrade. The Ethnographic museum is an important cultural institution where memories of traditional culture and history are produced and presented – giving shape and meaning to the official historical narrative of the Serbian society. In line with the current research within memory studies, this study focus on a museum as a site of memory, or a “lieux de mémoire” in Pierre Nora’s terms, where objects of the past are selected and displayed in order to remind us about what once was.\(^{10}\) As Susan A. Crane expresses, a site of memory can be understood as “[a] central remembering organ in the social body.”\(^{11}\) The Ethnographic Museum in Belgrade serves in this regard as an interesting object of study in order to understand how ideas about national identity and heritage are transmitted and sustained in the Serbian society.

The lack of interest of the Ottoman cultural heritage in the Balkans due to the Turks’ role as the negative “Other” in Serbian national identity discourses, has resulted in both neglect and destruction of the material and cultural heritage of five centuries of Ottoman rule in Serbia. This study stems from a belief that a further retrospection of the history and its representation in Serbia can contribute to a new route towards a better understanding and in turn a common appreciation of the Ottoman past in the Balkans.

1.1. Aim of study

The overall aim of the thesis is to give the reader a further understanding of the mechanisms behind the continuous neglect and lack of appreciation of the Ottoman heritage in the Serbian society. The study emphasizes the role and importance of memory and historical interpretation in the contemporary museum practice in Serbia.


\(^{11}\) Susan A. Crane, “Writing the Individual Back into Collective Memory”, \textit{The American Historical Review}, 102, 5, 1997: 1383.
The thesis is not, however, an historical account of the Ottoman domination in Serbia. I will instead discuss the remembrance of Ottoman heritage and the role of this heritage vis-à-vis the conceptions and memory of Serbian “traditional culture”. The Ottoman heritage contrasts to what is commonly perceived as traditional culture in the Serbian society and the thesis will therefore touch upon the conception of “traditions” in a country characterized by ethnic diversity and multiculturalism. My objective is to analyze the memories of the Ottoman past in Serbia and to discuss the role these memories play in shaping the museum practice and the exhibition of traditional culture in the museum.

My research question is as follows:

How is the Ottoman past in Serbia remembered among the curators and how can their memories provide explanation for the exhibition and presentation of Ottoman culture and traditional culture in the museum?

Overall the thesis will draw conclusions and attention to the Ethnographic museum’s role as a site of memory in the Serbian society. The main theoretical assumption which the thesis rests on is that memory is a social activity that is shaped and is constantly being shaped by impressions from our surroundings. Memory can thus be understood as a tool which serves to legitimate present social order and conventions.

In terms of my research questions and study I will apply Maurice Halbwachs’ theory of collective memory in order to show how memories in large are a product of our social milieu. The study of memory is important in order to understand why some beliefs and ideas are stronger manifested and inflexible, while others are more likely to change. However, a great deal has been written about memory since Halbwachs, and I will also include the concept of sites of memory by Pierre Nora (Lieux de Mémoire, 1981), as my theoretical presumption is that the Ethnographic Museum as a site of memory in turn transmits and sustains the collective memory of Ottoman past in the society

A simplified model of the study’s logic:

12 Dennis P. Hupchick, The Balkans, 12.
1.2. Importance and contribution

Why Ottoman heritage?

Peaceful coexistence in the Balkans has been hindered by the continuous attempts to distance people of different ethnical backgrounds by insisting on the incompatibility between Serbian Orthodox culture and Islam. An important mission for further work of reconciliation should instead focus on the commonly held culture and history amongst the people in the region.\(^\text{15}\) Protection of cultural heritage and education about the various cultural expressions and identities can serve as important tools in democracy building. In the words of Freeman Tilden: “Through interpretation, understanding; through understanding, appreciation; through appreciation, protection.”\(^\text{16}\)

Protection and preservation should be called for as significant heritage sites such as churches, mosques and properties of symbolic value were destroyed and demolished during the wars in the 90s. According to UNESCO 75 per cent of cultural heritage in Bosnia and Herzegovina was destroyed after the war.\(^\text{17}\) The war in Kosovo, which lasted from 1998 to 1999, was also characterized by a systematic destruction of symbolic heritage sites. The organization, Cultural Heritage without Borders, reports that only 200 of the Ottoman tower houses which were built during the eighteenth and nineteenth century, known as “Kullas”, were left in 1999. Before the war, the Kullas numbered as much as 1200 in Kosovo. Due to its symbolic

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\(^{17}\) Kulturarv Utan Gränser, “Kulturarv”, 6.
value and importance to the Muslim Kosovo-Albanians, the destruction of the Ottoman tower houses was an important component of the warfare. 18

Why a museum and why the Ethnographic museum and its curators?

Many volumes have covered the question of national identity in Serbia; however, this study will focus on a museum as a site of memory where the past is re-invoked and re-presented. Museum practices in Serbia have been a part of a political tool in order to construct national narratives and memories which have run counter to the memories and representations of multiethnic coexistence and tolerance in the Balkans. 19 An examination of these practices might in turn give room for a new understanding and interpretation of the Ottoman past and cultural diversity in Serbia. By increasing and improving the capacities of museums in Serbia, they can in turn serve as important democratic arenas where difficult matters and cultural diversity can be discussed. 20

The Ethnographic Museum was chosen due to the fact that the National Museum has no permanent exhibition. The museum is the oldest public museum institution in Serbia, only seconded by the National Museum, which displays folk art and culture and was founded in 1901. 21 My assumption is that the museum serves as an important place for remembrance and appreciation of what is most culturally valuable and essential in the Serbian culture. As Susan A. Crane argues:

Museums are more than cultural institutions and showplaces of accumulated objects: they are sites of interaction between personal and collective identities, between memory and history, between information and knowledge production. 22

Museums also have cultural authority while at the same time represent encyclopedic claims to knowledge 23 and one might argue that “ [p]eople will believe what is represented to them

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in the name of authority[…].”

To study a collective of museum curators is therefore interesting in order to understand their role as memory makers as they are in charge of the public representation of history and memory to the public. My choice of cases is based on the assumption that these workers represent one of the important branches of cultural workers and interpreters within a society.

1.3. The method – A brief summary

My argumentation in this thesis rests on the assumption that museums are important opinion makers in the society. Museums serve as a channel where memories are transmitted precisely because museum stores memory of cultures and “fixes” memory through collection and presentation. However, a museum cannot in itself possess a memory, but the curators working in the museum can. My method is therefore to investigate the memories of the curators in the museum since I believe that their interpretation of memories and of the past is crucial for the interaction and presentation of historical memory at the museum. The curators are notwithstanding the ones which are in charge of what should be valued and what will in turn be presented to the wider public. The curators must also be understood and interpreted, not only as museum professionals, but also as Serbian citizens born and raised in Serbia. They serve in this context as cases of individual interpretation of collectively held memories.

The material for my analysis is first and foremost the conversations with the curators during the structured interviews which were recorded. However, also the material from my participant observation, i.e., the conversations that I had with them on occasional basis, ranging from encounters at the terrace at the premises to more or less intimate conversations at the curators offices, is also included.

Next to focusing on the Ethnographic museum and the curators working there, I also had conversations with anthropologists and ethnologists in other research and museum institutions.

It should be noted that visits to museums and conversations with professionals outside the Ethnographic museum, together with a review of the material which I was given from the

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various institutions, namely, museum catalogs, museum pamphlets, history literature for high school students and other research material also adds to my analytical vantage point and interpretation of the interviews.

1.4. Sources and contemporary work

When discussing the role of memory and remembrance of the past in Serbia it seems eligible to start the introduction of my study by bringing the work of Maria Todorova into notice. In her book, *Balkan identities – Nation and Memory* (2004), she argues that the role of historical memory has been one of the principal tools in the literature of social change and identity transformations in the Balkans. Todorova has written many volumes where she refutes the stereotypes and myths about the “Balkan ghosts” and “ancient hatred” which has dominated the scholarly discourse both in the Balkans and internationally. *Imagining the Balkans* (1997) by Todorova, serves as my vantage point when explaining the perceptions of Ottoman heritage and legacy. Her writings are, however, influenced by the work of Edward Said which in 1978 published the accredited book, *Orientalism*. “The Orient”, he argues, is a European invention which contrasts to what is perceived as “the West” or “the Occident.”

The importance of the reconstruction of cultural heritage in reconciliation processes in the Balkans particularly has been the research focus of the European research network within the CRIC project. (CRIC - Cultural heritage and the re-construction of identities after conflict) Within this project, however, the utilization of heritage sites and manipulation of history in the Balkans has only been investigated in the case of Bosnia. There are however other NGO’s such as the Sweden based organization *Cultural Heritage Without Borders* which has worked in the Balkans as a whole, pursuing democracy and reconciliation through the reconstruction and information about heritage. These projects have functioned as important examples and guides for how you can approach heritage interpretations and memory in the Balkans. In terms of the museum practice in Serbia and especially in regards of the Ethnographic Museum, I have extracted information from the work of the anthropologist, Ljiljana Gavrilović. Marina Simić’ essay “Displaying Nationality as Traditional Culture in the Belgrade Ethnographic Museum” has also served as important background material for

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the museum display and presentation in the Ethnographic museum. Also the essay „National Museums in Serbia: A Story of Intertwined Identities” by Aleksandar Ignjatović and Olga Manojlović Pintar has served as a valuable source for this study.

1.5. Structure of the thesis

II The following chapter will give a short outline and background of the Ottoman Empire, but will first and foremost discuss and present some of the perceptions of Ottoman rule in Serbia.

III In Chapter three I will provide for the theoretical background of this study. I will first discuss Halbwachs’ theories on collective memory and social frameworks and then discuss the relationship between memory and history. I will also provide an outline of Pierre Nora’s concept of sites of memory. The chapter will also discuss the concepts of tradition and heritage and how they relate to the theory of collective memory.

III Chapter four concerns the methodological considerations of this study. The chapter is limited to include my method in the field and method of the analysis.

V In chapter five the analysis will be presented. Here I will start by introducing the Ethnographic museum and the exhibition of traditional culture in the museum. Then I will provide for a short presentation of the curators and give light to the working relations at the museum. The main part of the analysis, however, gives light to the research question and is organized in two main sections. First I will examine the remembrance and memory of the curators of the Ottoman past under “Recollections of the Ottoman past.” Then I will discuss the treatment and exhibition of Ottoman heritage by the informants. The role of the curators as memory makers will also be discussed in order to give light to other factors which can explain the treatment of Ottoman heritage in the museum.

VI In chapter six I will present the conclusions of this study.

The Appendix includes three different maps of the Ottoman Empire and domination in the Balkans, together with an outline of the interviews and informants. I have also included the questions which were asked in the qualitative interviews. I have provided for the question formularies both in English and in Serbian.
CHAPTER TWO

2. 0. Background – The Ottoman Empire

In the following chapter I will provide for a short historical background of the Ottoman rule in Serbia, as well as an introduction to some of the sources to the negative stereotypes associated with “the Turks” in the Serbian society.

The Ottomans emerged from a number of Anatolian Islamic principalities which succeeded the Rum Seljuk Empire. A power vacuum had appeared in the Asia Minor due to the defeat of the Mongols in 1243 and the increasingly loss of territory of the Byzantine Empire. After the conquest of Constantinople in 1453, the Ottomans rose and formed one of the mightiest and long lived multiethnic empires the world has seen, only matched by the Byzantine and the Roman Empire. At the height of their empire in the sixteenth century the Ottomans ruled over a territory stretching from Hungary to Yemen, Algeria to Crimea and Iraq. (See map 2 included in the appendix.) The Ottoman rule was characterized by a strong centralized authority (the sultan) that lay the ground for military conquest and expansion. They enjoyed great advantages compared to their European counterparts in terms of their concept of “holy war” (jihad) which ensured the Ottomans with a highly motivated military force. As the Ottomans also expanded their rule, however, the empire grew rich in land and possessions making conversion and submission attractive.

The Ottomans have been perceived as pragmatic rulers who executed tolerance towards their non-Muslim subjects which were known as the “zimmis”. They had a complex and dynamic foreign policy and were during their great expansion admired and feared by their European rivals. Despite of their long lasting rule and domination in world politics for almost six centuries, the Ottoman Empire has remained one of the least studied and understood empires. Instead, its renown has suffered from many misinterpretations. This is partly explained by the literature provided for by European travelers or officials’ writings which, however detailed and valuable, are biased as they were inclined to perceive the empire from a

31 Ágoston and Masters, “Introduction”, xxviii.
33 Hupchick, The Balkans, 103.
34 Hupchick, The Balkans, 144.
35 Ágoston and Masters, “Introduction”, xxviii.
36 Ágoston and Masters, “Introduction”, xxviii.
European perspective. Furthermore, much of the history writing in Europe, but also in previous Ottoman successor states, took place in the last centuries of Ottoman rule when the Ottomans struggled to keep track of and follow European scientific developments. The Ottomans have therefore suffered from negative labels and interpretations such as “the sick man of Europe” and “the Ottoman yoke.”

2.1. Perceptions of the Ottoman legacy in Serbia

In *Imagining the Balkans* Todorova writes: “[t]he Ottoman legacy is not simply the bulk of characteristics which accumulated from the fourteenth to the twentieth century, but a continuous and complex process, which ended during the nineteenth and the early twentieth century.” As the Ottoman Empire started to lose its grip and power during the last two centuries of its rule in the Balkans, the 19th century in Serbia has been characterized as a period of Serbian upspring against the Ottomans in their quest for independent Serbian statehood. The first autonomous Serbian principality was created in 1830 and the boundaries of this state remained unchanged until 1879, when the treaty of Berlin secured the political independence from the Ottoman rule. Kosovo remained, however, under Ottoman control.

(See map 3 in the Appendix.)

After the First World War, when the Ottoman Empire collapsed and Mustafa Kemal Ataturk started the nationalization process of the remains of the empire, which constitutes modern Turkey, a process of de-Ottomanization started in Serbia as well as in the other Balkan countries. The de-Ottomanization process was according to Todorova characterized by a constant effort to distance Serbia and the other countries from the former Ottoman/Muslim occupier. Todorova writes:

> The Ottomans have been unanimously described as bearers of an essentially different and alien civilization characterized by a fanatic and militant religion, which introduced different economic and societal practices and brought about the pastoralization and agrarianization of the Balkans.

As the period of liberalization from the Ottoman domination coincided with the growing romanticism of nationhood and national self-awareness, Turkey was perceived as the

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37 Ágoston and Masters, “Introduction”, xxxv, see also *Imperial Legacy – The Ottoman Imprint on the Balkans and the Middle East* edited by L. Carl Brown, 1996.
38 Maria Todorova, *Imagining the Balkans*, 168.
40 Maria Todorova, “The Ottoman Legacy in the Balkans”, 59.
negative “Other” which served as an opposition to the Serbians national self-image. However, the negative perceptions of the Ottoman rule in Serbia must be viewed in light of the academic discourse in Western scholarships, in which the Ottomans and Eastern cultures are treated as the Oriental “Other” with which the European self encounters. In Orientalism, Said argues that:

Orientalism can be discussed and analyzed as the corporate institution for dealing with the Orient - dealing with it by making statements about it, authorizing views of it, describing it, by teaching it, ruling over it: in short, Orientalism as a Western style of dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient.

Said notes that the studies of Orientalism produced exact and positive knowledge of the Orient, but also what he calls “second-order knowledge”; “[l]urking in such places as the “Oriental” tale, the mythology of the mysterious East, notions of Asian inscrutability - with a life of its own[...].”

Although Said has also been criticized for essentializing “the West”, he however brought upon a critical discussion in the field concerning essentialization of cultures by categorizing human reality and gave light to the biases inherent in European history writing of the Middle East. In Imagining the Balkans, Todorova argues that the picture of Balkan and “balkanization” is an oriental variation on a Balkan theme, where ”Balkan” and “balkanization” are understood as negative designators which run counter to perceptions of “civilized” and which is analogous with political instability. Todorova also argues that a common assertion in academia has also been that the Balkan and Eastern European Countries by-passed the Renaissance and Reformation which had severe cultural consequences. The idea of the “Ottoman disruption” of the natural development of the Southeast European countries towards humanism and the European Renaissance is also a contemporary historical notion in Serbia today. In a newly printed history book for Serbian 7th graders it is stated that after the fall of Byzantine, the Western Europe aroused as the “[h]eart of progress and of modern civilizations [whereas] Serbia was left outside the main course of European

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42 Said, Orientalism, 3.
43 Said, Orientalism, 52.
44 Todorova, Imagining the Balkans, 9-10, Suraiya Faroqhi, Approaching Ottoman History: An introduction to the Sources (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 110.
45 Maria Todorova, Imagining the Balkans, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 8, 33.
47 Maria Todorova, “The Ottoman Legacy in the Balkans”, 70.
development.” The progress of countries and people that remained in the Balkans was thus interrupted by the Ottoman conquerors.48

Against the backdrop of the ideas of “the Orient” in Europe then, and thus, the negative attributions to the Ottoman rule, the Ottoman domination which lasted almost half a millennium was perceived in Serbia as an incompatible and foreign imposition on the Serbian and Christian medieval society. This was also the view in which Balkan historiography was based on during the nineteenth century.49

Approaching the “Ottoman heritage” in Serbia therefore must be seen in relation with the Western as well as Balkan scholarly presentations and discussion of Orientalism and “Balkanization”, as they serve as a backbone of our cultural interpretation of the region. When we are discussing Ottoman legacy in Serbia we are also discussing the role of Europe, as the negative perceptions of this legacy are stemming from the discourse which has treated the Oriental as inferior to Europe. As the example with the schoolbook shows, these manifestations of the images of Balkan are present in contemporary historical narratives in Serbia.

Next to the academic scholarships and discourse dealing with history and culture in Serbia, one of the most influential medium where the negative image of “the Turks” is maintained is the epic poetry traditions. These epics concern particularly warfare values and victimization under the Turks and make part of curriculum in Serbian schools.50

One of the most famous and widely known epics is the battle of Kosovo in 1389 when the Serbians together with other Balkan peoples fought against the Turks. The epic is a narration of the Serbian king Lazar who dies as a martyr in the cosmic Kosovo battle as he chose the “heavenly kingdom of Serbia” over a Serbian kingdom on earth.51 The ideas and symbolism of Turks as the enemy and the wholly “Other” in epics like these, serve to maintain the hostile image of Turks in Serbian collective memory. Marko Šuica claims in his essay “Perceptions of the Ottoman Empire in Serbia” that the ideas of Kosovo in Serbia today are a result of the continuing picture of the Turks as occupiers. “The Kosovo battle has remained a

49 Todorova, Imagining the Balkans, 162.
50 Stojanović, “Construction of historical Consciousness”, 331.
medium through which the Serbian values are defined.” Kosovo has therefore come to represent important values such as patriotism, Christian identity and freedom.

However, the negative relation in Serbia towards the Ottoman rule and legacy is complex and manifests through a variation of channels, not only school literature and in academia. Šuica also argues that commemoration practices and holidays celebrating the liberation from the Turks, as well as mass media are a part of maintaining these negative stereotypes in the society.

The historical and contemporary context of common perceptions of Ottoman legacy and the Orient is important to highlight in order to understand how memories of this period have been shaped and are manifested today in the society by means of the media mentioned. As Lowenthal notes; “Remembering our past is crucial for our sense of identity […], to know who we were confirms that we are.” It is my claim that these memories serves to shape the Serbian national and collective identity. When discussing collective memory it is more or less implicit that we are also discussion identity. Halbwachs’ account of historical memory touches upon how an already assumed identity invents a past which is in accordance with that identity. In order for a collective identity to be kept in existence, the reference to a common past is an important condition. These assumptions rest on the work of various authors such as Hobsbawn, Iver B. Neumann, Benedict Anderson, Michael Focault and especially Anthony D. Smith, who argues; “[i]f nations exist in space, they are equally anchored in time.” In Chosen Peoples he terms nationalists as “political archaeologists”: “[b]ent on rediscovering and bringing to light the successive layers of their community’s past, and thereby proving the antiquity, continuity, and dignity of the nation.”

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53 “Sretenje Dan Državnosti” which is celebrated 15. February and “Vidovdan”, celebrated on the 28. June, both center on the liberation of the Turks. Šuica, “Percepija Osmanskog Carstva u Srbiji” in Imaginarni Turčin, 287-288.
58 Smith, Chosen Peoples, 167.
However, I have chosen not to focus explicitly on the shaping of national identity through memory. I intend in this context only to give attention to the relationship between these two concepts and refer instead to literature that deals with these questions.  

With this background I have intended to show how the contemporary discourse on Orientalism and the idea of the “Turkish Other” is maintained and consumed in various aspects of daily life in Serbia. The following parts of the thesis will focus on the transmission of memory through museum institutions, and then particularly the Ethnographic Museum. As I have already argued in the introduction; my aim is to come to a better understanding of the curators’ memory of the Ottoman legacy in Serbia in order to see what role these memories play as components of the museum exhibition and presentation of culture in the museum at large. Museums objectify memory and attach meaning to these objects and therefore shape the political and ideological perceptions in the society.

CHAPTER THREE

3.0. Introduction to the theory of collective memory

We moderns have so devoted the resources of our science to taxidermy that there is now virtually nothing that is not considerably more lively after death than it was before.

During the second half of the twentieth century the research within memory literature has expanded quite extensively, and this period has been referred to as a “memory boom” within the academia. The ideas and studies about memory are not, however, a new phenomenon, but can be traced back to the antiquity and to the philosophical discussions of Plato. But as Ian Hacking explains in his book, *Rewriting the Soul: Multiple Personality and the Sciences of Memory* (1995), the study of memory from the antiquity to the Enlightenment was mainly about “the art of memory”, which meant knowing how to remember. Newer and present studies of memory are instead dealing with “knowing that”, as Hacking puts it, treating


60 Susan A. Crane, “Introduction to Museums and Memory”, 2-3.


memory as the object of study itself. The new interest and expansion of memory studies since the 1970s has been referred to as “new memory studies”.

What, then, brought on this “new” and profound interest in exploring commemoration? Pierre Nora, one of the pioneers within the field of memory studies with his monumental seven volume work, says that “[w]e speak so much of memory because it is so little of it left.” In his view, our obsession with memory is explained by the loss of it due to increased historical consciousness. The relationship between memory and history, however, will be further elaborated on in following sections of this study. Nonetheless, the twentieth century also brought with it two world wars and the near execution of the entire European Jewish citizenry. It is especially in terms of the latter that issues of memory and remembrance have been valued as particularly significant during the latter half of the past century. It is also within this field that the studies of memory have been largely represented.

3.1. Choice of theory and limitation

The next pages will discuss the some of the main theoretical challenges and concepts within the issues of commemoration. To explain what is noted above, namely, what people remember and in what way, is a challenging task which is being conducted with different emphasis on epistemological and methodological strategies. This is especially evident in regards of the role of agency in remembering processes when it comes to studying memory as individual- or collective level phenomena.

My theoretical vantage point here is the theory of collective memory, which was first introduced in 1925 by the Durkheimian student, Maurice Halbwachs, in his work, Les Cadres Sociaux de la Mémoire. This work was first translated in 1975 and it was titled “The Social Frameworks of Memory.” Halbwachs contributed to a further understanding of how

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65 Pierre Nora, “Between Memory and History”, 2.
individual memory is manifested vis-à-vis collective memories. In the introduction of the English translation of Halbwachs groundbreaking work of the collective memory study, On Collective Memory (1992), Lewis A. Coser writes that “one may now assert with confidence that his work on collective memory is path-breaking and will have continued impact.” Halbwachs might be considered as the “founding father” of contemporary memory studies, extracting his thoughts through the influence of, among others, Émile Durkheim and Henry Bergson.

One might wonder why one seemingly “old-fashioned” theory about memory should be the focus of this study in the ravel of all the recent literature on memory that has come to the surface in the last 30 years. Halbwachs is however, as one might put it, a “natural” vantage point when studying memory. Some of the most influential and important work within the new field of memory studies have been influenced by Halbwachs. In terms of my own research questions and study I find it useful to use Halbwachs’ theories on collective memory in order to show how memories in large are a product of our social milieu. The study of collective memory aids us to understand why some beliefs remain unaltered and inflexible, while others are more likely to change.

However, a great deal has been written about memory since Halbwachs, and in terms of my own study I will also include the concept of sites of memory by Pierre Nora in order to highlight the role of the Ethnographic Museum as a medium for the transmission of collective memory. Other contemporary contributions in the field of memory studies will also be highlighted, involving among others Susan. A. Crane who has conducted much research on memory and museums. David Lowenthal’s concept of heritage will also serve as an important background, together with Eric Hobsbawm’s theory of the invention of traditions. I will also apply Yael Zerubavel’s conceptualization of counter memory and master commemorative narrative when discussing the profile and exhibition of culture in the Ethnographic museum.

The theoretical discussion will be limited to explaining the theory of social frameworks and the relationship between individual memories and collective memories. This is important in order to understand how memories are shaped by our present surroundings. I will also briefly describe the relationship between memory and history as well as introducing the concepts of tradition and heritage which are crucial notions in my study.

3.2. Collective memory vis-à-vis individual memory

Memories are coming to us from our social milieu, argued Maurice Halbwachs, influenced by Émile Durkheim who largely kept the collective as an explanatory base for understanding social phenomena. Memories, according to Halbwachs, must be perceived as “psychic states [subsistent] in the mind in an unconscious state and […] they can become conscious again when recollected.” The notion of “collective” is first and foremost grounded in the perception that it is in the society that people acquire their memories. “Most of the time, when I remember, it is others who spur me on; their memory comes to the aid of mine and mine relies on theirs.”

Halbwachs defines these social environments as “social frameworks” which can be exemplified as a group of friends, our family, or for instance a work collective. Social frameworks can also be understood as social contexts or structures. Halbwachs describes social frameworks as instruments used by the collective memory in reconstructing an image or event of the past which, according to Halbwachs, is in accord with the dominant thoughts in the society. In “The Social Frameworks of Memory”, Halbwachs uses the family as a group or framework in order to discuss all that is social in individual recollections: “[e]ach family has its proper mentality, its memories which alone commemorates, and its secrets that are revealed only to its members.” He continues by arguing that: “They [memories] express the general attitude of the group; they not only reproduce its history but also define its nature and its qualities and weaknesses.”

77 Halbwachs, “The Social Frameworks of Memory”, 38.
Halbwachs’ theory of collective memory is mainly dealing with the question of how we remember instead of what we remember. Collective memory in Halbwachs’ terms should not then be understood as a collection of memories. That is, a collection of individual memories which are aggregated to the society level. Presumptions of memory of this sort concerns more the question of what, than the question of how, and also view the individual as the central agent in the remembering processes.

Consequently, collective memory in Halbwachs’s terms has roughly three implications. First, memory is a social phenomenon; I cannot recall anything without a social framework. Second, since memory is triggered by the social context the remembering always takes place in the present and must be perceived as a current phenomenon. Third, since memories take place in the present the meaning given to them is molded and constructed by the present circumstances.81

Halbwachs considers remembering to be a social activity, as opposed to psychologists who argue that remembering is an entirely individual process. He criticizes psychological understandings of memory, because they presume individuals to be isolated beings and independent of their social circumstances.82 “There is no point in seeking where they [memories] are preserved in my brain or in some nook of my mind to which I alone have access: for they are recalled to me externally, and the groups of which I am part at any time give me the means to reconstruct them.”83 Halbwachs exemplifies this by illustrating the problems of tracing individual memory in childhood memories:

A child nine or ten years old possesses many recollections, both recent and fairly old. What would this child be able to retain if he is abruptly separated from his family, transported to a country where his language is not spoken, where neither the appearance of people and places, nor their customs, resemble in any way that which was familiar to him up to this moment?[…] It seems that at the same time the child will have lost the ability to remember in the second society all that he did and all that impressed him, which he used to recall without difficulty, in the first. In order to retrieve some of these uncertain and incomplete memories it is necessary that the child, in the new society of which he is part, at least be shown images reconstructing for a moment the group and the milieu from which the child had been torn.84

It is hard to come around the social nature of individual remembering and forgetting, which has also been, as Kansteiner points out, emphasized to a large extent in recent psychological

82 Halbwachs, “The Social Frameworks of Memory”, 38.
and neurological studies. One of the main critiques of Halbwachs’ theory of collective memory, however, concerns the role of individual agency in memory processes. One may be tempted to propose that individual perceptions and understanding of memory also should and can influence the ascribed meaning to the memories. It is possible to imagine that two persons which belong to the same social milieu and group might have different understandings and meanings attached to the same collective memory. Nevertheless, Halbwachs’ notion of the collective in remembering processes does not imply that one should dismiss the role of the individual altogether. Briefly put, one can state that Halbwachs positioned himself somewhere between the social determinism of Durkheim, and Bergson’s individualism. Halbwachs argues that it is the individual who remembers, although the remembering takes place together with others. We as individuals can therefore also be understood as agents in the sense that we negotiate memories and we attach meaning to them. We are the compositors of our own memory symphony; although what we base our interpretation on has been transmitted to us from our social milieu. Halbwachs derives the different perceptions on collective memory from the different compositions of social groups and milieus which persons have been situated to. He argues that our viewpoints changes as we are changing our social environment. He therefore assess that there exists a diversity of viewpoints and interpretations of the collective memory. Nevertheless, Halbwachs argues that the influences which accounts for the diversity of opinions and viewpoints are always grounded in social circumstances.

In the conclusion of “The Social Framework of Memory”, Halbwachs eloquently sums up this relationship when stating:

“That is to say, our recollections, each taken in itself, belong to everybody; but the coherence or arrangement of our recollections belongs only to ourselves- we alone are capable of knowing and calling them to mind.”

3.3. Collective memory and history

The relationship between memory and history remains as Kansteiner puts it: “one of the interesting challenges in the field.” 90 There have been many theoretical discussions concerning this relationship and I will only briefly present some of the main discussions and functions of these two modes of operation in regards to Halbwachs and Pierre Nora.

Both Halbwachs and Nora argue that collective memory must be distinguished from history. Halbwachs claims that “so long as remembrance continues to exist, it is useless to set down in writing or otherwise fix it in memory.” 91 This is stemming from the idea that collective memory is an actual phenomenon and it is kept alive in the consciousness of the group. History, on the other hand, is only practiced when the living contact with the past is lost and when tradition ends. 92

Halbwachs distinguishes between what he calls “historical memory”, which is memory of historical events, and autobiographical memory which can be understood as what Bergson refers to as “lived experience”. 93 The historical memory, Halbwachs explains, is external to us as we have only been in contact with this memory through written records or other information coming from the “outside.” Historical memory is thus an external memory whereas autobiographical memory can be understood as a personal memory. 94 In addition, history is presented as a “universal memory” as it seeks to present a total image of the past. This is explained by the fact that history presupposes that all changes are related and in this way it can be interpreted as universal memory. 95 Collective memory, on the other hand, can never be universal since every collective memory requires the support of a group in order to be kept as a memory. We have no possibility to participate in all the events that history encompasses. Thus, we are not part of a social milieu which can influence our remembrance and consequently then be a part of the collective memory. 96

In terms of the curators’ memory of the Ottoman past, one might argue that we are not talking about a collective memory as such, since the curators were not alive during the Ottoman

90 Kansteiner, “Finding Meaning in Memory”, 184.
91 Halbwachs, The Collective Memory, 79.
93 Crane, “Writing the Individual Back into Collective Memory”, 1373.
94 Halbwachs, The Collective Memory, 52.
95 Halbwachs, The Collective Memory, 86, 84.
96 Halbwachs, “The Collective Memory”, 84.
occupation in Serbia. However, the distinction between memory and history is a delicate one. In fact, Halbwachs also argues that history shapes our collective memory and is shaped by it.\textsuperscript{97} Susan A. Crane offers a possible key in order to clear the ambiguous boundary between collective and historical memory as she suggests that we can understand historical memory as the content of the collective memory and where the latter function also as the framework where historical remembering takes place.\textsuperscript{98}

Halbwachs gives a good example of how our personal memories regain contact with the “scheme of history“:

Imagine a child arriving at night at a railroad station crowded with soldiers. Whether they were on their way to, or back from, the trenches, or merely on maneuvers, would make no difference at all to him. Wouldn’t the distant thunder of artillery of Waterloo be but muted thunder? Any being resembling such a youngster, reduced solely to his perceptions, would keep only a fragile and transitory remembrance of such a scene.

He continues:

To grasp the historical reality underlying this image, he would have to go outside himself and be placed within a group viewpoint, so that he might see how such an event marked a famous date because it is imbued with the concerns, interest, passions, of a nation. But at that moment the event would cease to be merely a personal impression.\textsuperscript{99}

This example shows how a memory of a personally experienced event can be given new meaning by outlines of history. It can therefore be suggested that historical interpretations both build on memory, as well as that memory both incorporates and refashion historical knowledge in the remembrance process.\textsuperscript{100}

3.4. Pierre Nora and sites of memory

Pierre Nora, who was influenced by Halbwachs, argues that it is in fact the historical memory, and not collective memory, that characterizes modern societies. In the famous and monumental seven volume work, Les Lieux de Mémoire, Nora argues that the acceleration of history has brought upon the end of real environments of memory, milieux de mémoire. Environments of memory existed in pre-modern societies which secured the transmission and conservation of collectively remembered values through tales and stories.\textsuperscript{101} The advancement

\textsuperscript{97} Crane, “Writing the Individual Back in to the Collective Memory”, 1381.
\textsuperscript{98} Crane, “Writing the Individual Back in to the Collective Memory”, 1373.
\textsuperscript{99} Halbwachs, The Collective Memory, 58.
\textsuperscript{100} Tamar Katriel, “Sites of Memory: Discourses of the Past in Israeli Pioneering Settlement Museums”, 100.
of history and its increasing importance in the modern society has come to mean, according
to Nora, that the modern world is not any longer characterized by continuity and permanence,
but change.\textsuperscript{102} This assumption derives from the idea that history is driven by change; in
contrast to traditions, rituals and myths where continuity impairs historical time.\textsuperscript{103} History,
argues Halbwachs, is not interested in repetition, but rupture and upheaval.\textsuperscript{104} Therefore,
when our society is dependent mainly on written records of memory, it is according to Nora a
fundamental change in how we relate to the past in the present. What Nora suggests is that
the advance of rationalization and the shift from pre-modern societies to modern did away
with the environments of memory. The historical consciousness which characterize our
modern society made memory an excess with the advancement of written records and traces.\textsuperscript{105}
As previously mentioned; Nora claims that we are obsessed with memory today
because there is so little of it left. We are instead more and more concerned with sites of
memory, lieux de mémoire, as they seek to reinforce tradition and to provide for historical
continuity.\textsuperscript{106} We seek out sites of memory because there are no longer any environments of
memory.\textsuperscript{107}

A site of memory exists in the shape of museums, archives, cemeteries, anniversaries,
monuments; everything that marks the ritual of a society.\textsuperscript{108} These sites of memory are what
Nora describes as “the ultimate embodiments of a memorial consciousness that has barely
survived in a historical age that calls out for memory because it has abandoned it.”\textsuperscript{109} In his
critical appraisal of Nora’s notion of sites of memory, Paul Ricoeur argues that sites of
memory incorporate material, symbolic and functional meanings. They have a material
meaning as these sites are anchored in reality, while they also draw upon “existing” and given
facts of the world that surrounds us. Sites of memory also have a symbolism embedded in
them as they give form to memory and trigger our imagination. They are also functional since

\textsuperscript{102} Pierre Nora, “Reasons for the Current Upsurge in Memory”, in \textit{The Collective Memory Reader}, ed. Jeffrey K.
\textsuperscript{103} Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi, “Zakhor: Jewish History and Jewish memory”, in \textit{The Collective Memory Reader}, ed.
\textsuperscript{104} Halbwachs, \textit{The Collective Memory}, 85.
\textsuperscript{105} Nora, “Reasons for the Current Upsurge in Memory”, 438-439.
\textsuperscript{106} Danièle Hervieu-Léger, “Religion as a Chain of Memory”, 385.
\textsuperscript{107} Nora, “Between Memory and History”, 7.
\textsuperscript{108} Nora, “Between Memory and History”, 12.
\textsuperscript{109} Nora, “Between Memory and History”, 12.
they are important components in ritualizing the past as they preserve and maintain continuity with the past. They are in Nora’s designation; “illusions of eternity.”

I will present the Ethnographic Museum in Belgrade as a site of memory in the first part of the analysis in chapter five. The museum attempts to shape the memory of the past and it takes part in the constructing of the Serbian national identity, as the museum transmits values and traditions in line with the official national narrative. In accordance with the theories of Nora, the museum can be understood then as a “heuristic device” which supplies the society with memories. However, in the following section I will introduce some of the theoretical concepts and background which concerns traditional culture and appreciation of heritage. These concepts will be applied in my analysis.

### 3.5. Multiculturalism and traditional culture

In studies of folklore and ethnology, tradition is understood as a process which transfers elements of culture from one generation to the other where folklore is the cultural expression which has roots in the past and has often been treated as a natural object. Heritage, on the other hand, can be understood as “[p]henomena in a group’s past that are given high symbolic value and, therefore, must be protected for the future.” Cultural heritage can therefore be termed as the *material* or the cultural fabric which tradition carries forward and which serves as a connection between the past and the present. When talking about tradition and cultural heritage today however, we understand it as processes created in the present, where cultural heritage and tradition is selected and appointed. In fact, David Lowenthal suggests that heritage today is a “popular cult”. We favor heritage and celebrate it precisely because of their inherent biases - heritage is by large understood as something exclusive as it is “ours” and “for us alone”.

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These understandings of tradition and heritage as social constructs rest on the concept of “invented tradition”, introduced by the Marxist historian, Eric Hobsbawm. Hobsbawm emphasizes that traditions are often perceived as quite old, although many of them should be regarded as modern and quite recent phenomena. Like Nora, he suggests, that due to the changes which are penetrating our modern societies, the invention of traditions must be seen as an attempt to structure some parts of our modern life.¹¹⁹ Traditions in accordance with Hobsbawm’s conception can be understood as symbolic repetitions which refer to the past. Although an important distinction should be emphasized in terms of rituals and traditions, as the latter serve no practical function and are instead purely ideological manifestations. In sum, the symbolic meaning inherent in these traditions is therefore carried forward at the same time as they are referring to the past.¹²⁰ Being traditional, therefore, implies being quite modern.

Hobsbawn’s ideas about the social construction of traditions are closely connected to the theories of collective memory as they rest on the assumption that memory is largely formed in the present and is driven by contemporary interests.¹²¹ That is to say, by bringing forward “what once was”, traditions are also acts of commemorating the past in the present. The value of heritage and its significance and worth in society therefore rely on our current evaluation of it. Inevitably, in a society where different cultures and traditions exist alongside one another, “traditional” is problematic as an analytical tool of cultures. Surayia Faroqhi notes that “[t]raditional culture” tends to mean a system relatively free of internal contradictions, or at least one in which those contradictions which do exist are not perceived as such by those living in it.¹²² These “internal contradictions” can be understood as what Yael Zerubavel terms “counter memory” of cultures, a memory which directly opposes the master narrative. These are often views of marginalized individuals in society, whereas the master narrative represents the political elite’s construction of the past.¹²³

¹²¹ David Middleton and Derek Edwards, “Introduction”, 44.
Also Lowenthal points to the oppressive side of traditions: “Tradition generally omits, or prohibits the recounting of, facts about the past that might undermine ruling institutions.”

Consequently, due to the symbolic value that cultural heritage and traditions represent it is inevitable to speak about heritage politics and “politics of memory”. What should be considered heritage, and by whom? What heritage is considered important and what is included in discourses on national identity? What heritage is not? It is also necessary to address the normative character of traditions as they seek to influence the conduct of people. Traditions are important for our societal identity as they provide continuity with the past, which can be argued to be fundamental for our conceptions of a society.

CHAPTER FOUR

4.0. In the field – Methodological approach

This study is an ethnographic field study where I have conducted qualitative structured and semi-structured interviews with 6 out of 22 curators at the Ethnographic museum. These interviews took place from the beginning of March till the beginning of April 2012. When dealing with remembrance and attitudes and interpretations of the past, methods such as interviews and participant observations are commonly used.

Case selection

The selection of the curators can be referred to as snowball sampling. Before my arrival I had been in contact with a researcher at the Ethnographic Institute, SANU, in Belgrade, and through her I managed to get in touch with the curators at the museum. When the contact was established with the museum, I chose my cases more or less as a result of recommendation by some of the curators. The reason for this is that I did not have any other specific criteria to my cases other than that they should work as curators, and I looked upon their research areas and

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124 Lowenthal, *The Past is a Foreign Country*, 327.
collections in a random fashion. I was interested in coming closer to their remembrance and interpretation of Ottoman heritage and to study the curators as a collective, and not according to their specific area. However, it should be mentioned that one of the cases where chosen because his name was repeatedly mentioned by some of my informants as a potential subject of study, since, according to these curators, his previous work within the field of craftsmanship would be interesting for my study.

The interviews

My choices reflect my research question and theory which seeks to explain social phenomena such as memory, social discourse and interpretations of history. I was particularly interested in the informants’ interpretations of the past and what meaning they attached to it. My intentions were only to understand my informant’s construction and version of reality. Through in depth interviews it is possible to come closer to an understanding how the subject views himself and his surroundings.129

My interviews can be characterized as structured as well as semi-structured. However, as these questions and conversations brought up new questions and considering, the interviews always took a different form as a result of the different responses, viewpoints and interests of my informants. With one exception, all the interviews took place in the curators’ offices. All of them were recorded, whereas the information derived from participant observation was written down as field notes.

All but one interview were held in Serbian. It was important for me that the curators could answer the questions as freely as possible and not feel impeded by language barriers. I considered that it would be easier for me to understand their viewpoint and personality better if they expressed themselves in Serbian. I did not need a translator, however, whenever there were any language barriers during the interviews we managed to understand each other by either making references to English, or consulting a dictionary. There are, however, some moments in the recordings which are unclear, but then I have consulted native speakers in order to translate these parts.

The duration of the conversations varies from one to three hours. In the cases where the interviews lasted for three hours, they took place at two different occasions and were not held in one turn.

Sørensen notes that “It is important to recognize that interviews can have different purposes: “[t]hey […] should aim at different kinds of insight and discoveries […]”¹³⁰ I had all together around 20 questions which dealt both with their background and work experiences at the museum, together with questions regarding the Ottoman legacy in Serbia. I have included all the questions in the Appendix.

In Ethnology. Principles in Practice (1996) Hammersley and Atkinson discuss the differences concerning perspective- and information analysis. These methods are distinguished in terms of their treatment of the informants’ knowledge. Strictly put, information analysis tends to emphasize the information given by the informant and how this can give light to the topic under study, whilst perspective analysis tends to focus on analyzing the context and social placement of the informant: What can the information given from the respondent tell us about him and the culture to which she/he belongs? These methods, however, should be seen as complementary.¹³¹ This is also my aim in this study, both to include an analysis of the information given by the curators, as well as analyze to what extent their social context and placement can explain or give light to this knowledge.

In the interviews my questions focused both on the memories of the Ottoman past and meanings attributed to them, as well as issues regarding the social environment at the museum. This follows directly from my theory, which I use to analyze the communication of memories vis-à-vis the collective, but also between themselves. (See the Appendix for the question formulations.)

My role as a researcher

Ethnographers are more and more like the Cree hunter who (the story goes) came to Montreal to testify in court concerning the fate of his hunting lands in the new James Bay hydroelectric scheme. He would describe his way of life. But when administered the oath he hesitated: I”m not sure if I can tell the truth…. I can only tell what I know.¹³² My intentions with this study were only to understand as closely as possible my informants’ construct and view a certain aspect of their social reality. This means that I do not seek to

¹³⁰ Marie Louise Stig Sørensen, “Between the Lines and in the Margins: Interviewing People About Their Attitudes to Heritage and Identity” in Heritage Studies: Methods and Approaches, ed. Marie Louise Stig Sørensen and John Carman (London: Routledge, 2009), 168.
qualify any content as “true” or “false”, but rather to present individuals’ perspectives on a given topic. My method can therefore be described as post-modern, in distinction to more empiric and positivist approaches which assume that there is a truth to be found and as researchers we are suppose to discover it. However, it is important to emphasize some methodological discussions on the role of the researcher in the interview process and how this can have an effect on the information the respondent gives in an interview. Atkinson and Hammersley call this effect on the data material as “audience effect.” There are many different ways in which this effect can have an impact on the empirical material; however, I will confine myself in this discussion only to mention what I found relevant in my own research. Hammersley and Atkinson write: “[t]he informant’s perceptions about the characteristics of the social research, and of the actual research project and of the personal characteristics of the interviewer can strongly influence what they say.”

While conducting my research, I was surprised over the willingness and also interest that most of the informants showed when it came to accepting my request for interviews. They also spent as much time talking with me as I felt necessary. When it comes to the interview situation, I felt that one of the informants showed some unwillingness to answer my questions and also avoided the topic which I was tracing. It seemed to me that the informant did not take me, or the research I was pursuing, seriously. In addition, this curators also expressed at one point how she/he considered my research as unimportant and unnecessary. This was exemplified by both dismissing the importance of my questions and instead talking about other cultures as a general phenomenon and not sharing her viewpoints on the questions I asked. This might be a result of a number of factors, although this was in fact the only interview I held with an informant that I had not talked to in advance. With all the other informants I had engaged in informal conversations, drinking coffee or tea etc, prior to the structured interviews. Therefore, the informant had not been given any detailed information or got to know me before the interview. It is also possible that my position as a foreigner, and particularly, a foreigner from “the West” might have had an impact on her answers. As Serbia has often been portrayed in Western media and politics as a country of ethnic tensions and hatred, this particular informant might have been reluctant to speak her/his mind freely in the fear of contributing to western stereotype of Serbian mentality. As already mentioned, this informant also told me that my research was not of particular interest or that however good

133 Sørensen, “Between the Lines and in the Margins”, 168.
134 Hammersley and Atkinson, Feltmetodikk, 249.
the intensions were, in his/her opinion, this type of research could contribute to further ethnic divisions among people. Whether her attitude was triggered by my background as a Western, or whether the informant shared no interest in the topic, or maybe even knew little about it, I regard the answers given in this interview as being under the audience effect. By contrast, I felt that the other respondents talked quite honestly and openly, and that they did not feel particularly constrained in our conversations.

In terms of the above mentioned Cree hunter, all the answers from my informants are interpreted by me. Another researcher doing the same kind of research might be inclined to interpret the material differently. In the following pages I will, however, give a descriptive account of my method of analysis.

4.1. Method of analysis

My intention with the analysis is to scrutinize the treatment of the Ottoman heritage at the museum. The analysis will focus on two main questions: What do the curators perceive as Ottoman heritage and how is the Ottoman heritage remembered and treated in the museum?

I will discuss and give light to the memories of Ottoman legacy and their influence on the exhibition of traditional culture. I intend also to discuss the latter by shedding light on other factors which impact certain practices at the museum.

My thematic categorization in the analysis is drawn first and foremost from the topics that were current in the conversation with the curators. My method of analysis is based on techniques to identify themes prompted by Ryan and Bernard. They argue that themes in qualitative research is essential for qualitative research; if not we have “nothing to describe, nothing to compare, and nothing to explain.” 135 There are various techniques which a researcher can make use of, the ones that I have chosen here are the ones which I find most suitable to give light both to my research question, but also in terms of the material. My analysis will mainly focus on two methods in order to categorize themes. One of them is repetition. Ryan and Russel explain: “Some of the most obvious themes in a corpus of data are those “[t]opics that occur and reoccur” [...] or are “recurring regularities”. 136 Another method which I will add to my methodological framework is to compare expressions both from the same informant, but also to compare between different informants and to see how

136Ryan and Bernard, “Techniques to Identify Themes”, 89.
the expressions and statements are different or similar to one another. From this I have constructed subthemes, overall I provide for thematically categories where these social representations are manifested.

In his critical essay on memory and methodology, “Finding Meaning in Memory”, Wulf Kansteiner states that “[t]he success of memory studies has not been accompanied by significant conceptual and methodological advances in the research of collective memory processes.” 137 This is particular evident in terms of transmission and reception processes. Sørensen points out in her methodological account of heritage studies that latter studies lack methodological tools in order to analyze the dynamics and transmission of memory. 138 What are the mechanisms which tell us that memory is “at work”? In terms of my own analysis, the theory of collective memory serves as a theoretical background and vantage point more than an analytical tool. The theoretical emphasis is on the social construction of memories and their importance in explaining social phenomena and collective meaning. I answer instead Kansteiner’s criticism by applying the theory of collective memory on a museum. As I have already argued, a museum can be understood as a channel which transmits memory and sustain and upheld collective meaning and experiences in the society.

137 Kansteiner, “Finiding Meaning in Memory”, Abstract.
138 Sørensen, Heritage Studies, 165.
CHAPTER FIVE

5.0. The exhibition of the “traditional” in the Ethnographic museum – Conceptual Background

The Ethnographic Museum is located in the city center of Belgrade, close to the main “Republic Square”. The current permanent exhibition goes under the title “Traditional Culture of Serbs in the nineteenth and the twentieth century” and was opened in 2001. Objects which are displayed in a museum are traces of the past where each object can be perceived as a carrier of memory. However, in order for these objects to have any meaning for us they have to be put within a certain framework. Museum objects are therefore good examples where the dialectical relationship between memory (the object) and history (the narrative framework) becomes particularly obvious since museum objects are situated within an historical narrative.

139 The Ethnographic Museum. Photo included with the courtesy of the Ethnographic Museum.
140 The Ethnographic Museum in Belgrade, “Folk Culture on the Territory of SR Serbia in the 19th and 20th Centuries”, Museum pamphlet.
141 Katriel, “Sites of Memory”, 112.
Most importantly, a museum holds what Yael Zerubavel calls a “master commemorative narrative”. It can be understood as the “storyline” of the museum which seeks to encompass our shared past and which structures our collective memory. The main storyline is continuity as the narrative “gives order and direction to events that otherwise might be perceived as random or isolated.”

The master narrative of the Ethnographic Museum can be understood as “Serbian traditional culture”, since the permanent exhibition in the Ethnographic Museum is titled “Traditional Culture of Serbs in nineteenth and the twentieth century”. At one of the first information placates which I encountered in the main exhibition hall, it is stated that the aim of the exhibition is “[t]o show the unity of the Serbian people” who “gathered around sacred objects and centers of spirituality.”

The main center of spirituality is, according to the information-placate, the Peć Patriarchy, [t]o which the Serbian people from the whole South Slav area turned to.”

It has also been claimed that the museum’s task is “to save” and “protect” the traditional culture and the characteristics of the Serbian native culture.

In her book, Culture in Show-window: Toward a New Museology (2007), Ljiljana Gavrilović argues that national romanticism, which imbued the political culture when Serbian ethnology and the Ethnographic Museum were institutionalized at the beginning of the 20th century, is still reflected in the museum-practice today. The museum in its initial stages exhibited objects which were selected according to their beauty and exclusivity, and represented everything considered to be “ours” (Serbian), which meant “Serbian tradition” and Serbian identity. The traditional, she writes, was circumscribed to rural and idealized Serbian villages, although these were undefined areas in terms of space and time. It was also an

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144 The Peć patriarchy, which is located in Peć, Kosovo, became the seat of the Serbian Orthodox Church in 1346. Aleksandar Fotić, “Serbian Orthodox Church”, in The Encyclopedia of the Ottoman Empire, ed. Gábor Ágoston and Bruce Masters ( New York: Facts on File Inc, 2009), 519.
148 Гавриловић, Култура у изложу, 64.
149 Гавриловић, Култура у изложу, 64.
assumption that “foreign influences” were significantly lower in rural than in urban areas.\textsuperscript{150}

The legacy of this museum practice is still evident today. All the objects presented in the exhibitions were first and foremost from the nineteenth and the twentieth century, with the exception of a few objects from the eighteenth century. As a visitor I was therefore not able to grasp the rise of the “traditional culture” back to any historic time before the eighteenth century.\textsuperscript{151} When I asked the director why they only displayed objects from the nineteenth and twentieth century, she told me that the museum was not in possession of any older objects, but that the National Museum instead kept older objects and artifacts.\textsuperscript{152}

The conception and presentation of traditional culture in the museum must be regarded, however, in light of the museological practice in Serbia which Gavrilović and Marina Cvetković argue has not advanced alongside recent scientific developments in the fields of anthropology and ethnology.\textsuperscript{153} This in turn has therefore implications for the exhibiting and presenting of museum objects as well as the essentialist understanding of “traditional” culture.

\textbf{The exhibition space}

\begin{figure}[h]
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\caption{The exhibition space.}
\end{figure}

\textsuperscript{150}Гавриловић, Култура у изложу, 67.
\textsuperscript{151} This argument can also be traced in Simić’ article “Nationality as Traditional Culture at the Belgrade Ethnographic Museum”, 315.
\textsuperscript{152}Conversation with Vilma Niškanović, 11th of March, 2012.
\textsuperscript{153}Гавриловић, култура у изложу, 64, Marina Cvetković, “Displaying National Culture in Antinationalist Times”, 300.
The ground floor is mainly devoted to the display of folk costumes from the Pannonia area displayed in glass showcases. A small exhibition space for a temporary exhibition is also located at the ground floor next to the permanent exhibition of folk costumes. The temporary exhibition at the ground floor was at the time I visited the museum in March 2012 called “Memories of Couples”, where photographs from the mid-nineteenth century till the twentieth century portrayed couples in love. This was however a guest exhibition from the Museum of the City of Novi Sad. Altogether the exhibition space enfolds on three different floors, whereas housing-, textile- and dwelling exhibitions comprise the mid-floor and the first floor.

5.1. The curators

All together there are 22 curators at the museum of which 14 work in the department of the study of folk culture, while the rest of the curators are divided among the areas which cover marketing, documentation and the library. All of the curators graduated in ethnology and/or anthropology at Belgrade University. Two of the curators have been working at the museum for over 30 years, thus their field of research and occupation at the museum had varied over the years. However, the present distribution of research field and their collection of objects and range from, among others, dwelling, dolls, national costumes, textile and interior, housing, craftsmanship and glass.

Ljilja is born in 1962 and lives in Belgrade, although she spent the early stages of her life in the Southeast of Serbia where also her family is from. She is an ethnologist by profession and she has worked in the Ethnographic Museum since 1996 where she is in charge of the collection of textile and textile interior. She told me that she wanted to study ethnology as she had always had a “spirit of curiosity”.

Nikola is born in Belgrade in 1970, and spent some parts of his life in Jagodina (Central Serbia). He finished his studies in ethnology and anthropology in Belgrade during the 90s which he described as a very difficult and chaotic period in Serbia. He started working in the museum in 2001. He told me that his “formal position” was as a curator for the collection of household objects, although his field of interest lies within economic anthropology.

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154The Ethnographic Museum, photo of the main exhibition on the 1st floor. Picture included with the courtesy of the Ethnographic Museum.
Vladimir is born in Belgrade in 1962 and he is curator for the collections of animal husbandry, hunting and fishing, as well as goods and transports. He is currently also writing a doctoral thesis on ethno tourism in Serbia. Both Nikola and Vladimir told me that their interest was mostly directed towards contemporary culture. In regards of the two curators they were quite open and willing to share information. This can also be related by their “firm” status at the museum. Namely, as they explained to me they, in contrast to some other people, had “fought for their positions.”

Sonja is born in 1955 and has lived all her life in Belgrade. She considers herself to be more of a “Belgrader” than Serbian. She is a curator, but she is currently working at the documentation department. She is also the Deputy Director of the museum. Sonja told me that she had a wide field of interests and felt comfortable when she could do various kinds of work. Currently she is in charge of a doll collection, although she had had a great amount of exhibitions, covering various topics as she has been at the museum for a long time.

Ana is also born in 1955 in the northern Serbian province of Vojvodina, although she moved when she was a little girl to Zemun, a municipality in Belgrade. Zemun shares however the characteristics of Vojvodina which was for a long time a region under the influences of the Habsburg monarchy. This particular region was also her research area. She is a curator of the collection of folk costumes in the Pannonia area (northern Serbia and northeastern Croatia), and is also a museum advisor.

Miroslav told me that he had “undergone all the steps” within the institution and was now, like Ana, a museum advisor. He has been working in the museum for more than 30 years and will retire next year. His fields include such as metrology, ceramics, crafts and glass and he also conducted research in Mount Athos in northern Greece, which is particularly known for its monasteries and as a holy Orthodox center.155

The curators and the working environment

The emphasis Nikola lay on “formal position” when he described his work as a curator should be regarded in light of what Sonja mentioned, namely: “you are very free to do what you want to do.”156 The organization of the museum was defined by some as “undefined” and loose. I therefore got the feeling that there was a situation where, as Ljilja expressed it:

155 Hupchick, The Balkans, 52.
156 Interview with Sonja, 3rd of April, 2012.
“everyone is doing exactly what they want to do.” My impression from speaking with the curators was that mostly Ljilja and Ana were performing research within the collection they are in charge of, whereas the others followed their research interests which were not always so strictly confined to their collection of objects. As Nikola and Vladimir for instance were working on research for their PhDs covering more contemporary topics in economic anthropology and ethno tourism in Serbia.

After being introduced by some of the curators and after visiting the exhibition, I started to get the feeling that I was visiting the museum of what once was the Ethnographic museum. This was first and foremost an impression I was left with after talking with the curators about their work experiences. Most of the curators were portrayed a situation of a standstill. There was little or no activity in terms of field work and they rarely had any new exhibitions. Four of six curators mentioned that it was better before; both in terms of organization and activity.

“Today there is a crisis in the level of proficiency. It was more professional when I started working here. Unfortunately, the organization today is not at a very high level”, Ljilja recounts. She also expresses dissatisfaction with the communication between the colleagues, which she considers to be poor. “Everyone work just for their own good”, she says. Ana explains that the museum is in a process of transition and there is a lack of financial means in order to realize projects. When I asked her if she is planning to exhibit something in the near future, she says she had a desire to prepare an exhibition in relation to research which she is currently conducting on Old Slavonic culture in the Western part of Croatia, but she needs to perform an additional field study in order to finish her research.

“But that’s only my wish. I’m afraid that there’s no opportunity for that, both in terms of the financial situation of the museum and the current plans.”

She continues by mentioning her research project:

“This research was carried out over a very short amount of time, we’re talking about only 3-4 days, and that’s in fact only enough to start to get to know the field. We don’t have the opportunity to investigate more in depth and over longer periods of time.”

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158 Interview with Ljilja, 16th of March, 2012.
“I am just happy that I’ve been able to perform previous research and that I have material to work with”, she adds.

Ana mentions that the museum is in possession of research material from the 1930s of national costumes from the late nineteenth century and “from this it’s maybe possible to make comparisons and draw some conclusions about the changes.”

Miroslav also expresses his dissatisfaction over the present running of things in the museum.

“They are not doing field research anymore. I have an impression that the museum is not properly financed. Yes, we have better computers now and so on, and internet is of course useful, but we are not enough present, you know.”

He points to the fact that during the nineties, huge demographic changes took place and changed the ethnic composition in the former Yugoslavia. He tells me that 4 million people were relocated in this period and population changes of this magnitude had never before taken place in Yugoslavian history.

“These were huge ethnical changes. We have to perform research again to see what is new. What has changed?”

For Nikola, however, it was not the lack of money which is the main problem.

“The contact between us is worse now. Some technical things are better now, computers and so on, but all what’s left is worse. We have more money now, but we don’t spend them properly.”

5.2. Recollections of the Ottoman past in Serbia

In this section I will present the curators’ memories of the Ottoman rule in Serbia and their meanings attached to these memories. This is reflected in the theory of social framework by Halbwachs since social groups “maintain a living relation to collective memory.” How do the curators relate to Ottoman history and how do they remember the past? By investigating their historical memory my presumption is that it is possible to understand better the treatment of the Ottoman heritage at the museum. In turn, the impact of these memories and

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159 Interview with Ana, 27th of March, 2012.
160 Interview with Miroslav, 5th of April, 2012.
161 Interview with Nikola, 19th of March, 2012.
162 Crane, “Writing the Individual Back into Collective Memory”, 1376.
ideas of the Ottoman legacy will be discussed in comparison with other factors which affect the museum practice and presentation of cultures in the museum.

**What does it mean “Ottoman”?**

In the conversation with the curators the expressions “Ottoman”, “Oriental”, “Turkish” and “Turks” were used interchangeably.\(^{163}\) The terms appeared to represent a variation on the same theme. This is also evident from one of the museum brochures on kilim-making in Pirot (southeast of Serbia), where the centuries of Ottoman rule are referred to as “[d]uring the Turkish period”.\(^{164}\) This is important because it shows that the curators equate these terms, making them referents of the same thing. Confusion arises, however, when accurate meaning is supposed to be attached to the definitions. What are we actually talking about? This will be the focus of the following part of my analysis - what the curators interpret as “Ottoman” and “Oriental”. Nonetheless, some of the curators did scrutinized the meaning of the word “Ottoman”. For them, the term is rather unspecific as it entails Ottoman legacy, Oriental legacy and involves by and large contemporary Turkish influences.\(^ {165}\)

One of the difficulties in being specific in regards of the Ottoman heritage has to do with the memory of a cultural diversity that, according to the curators, has always existed in the Balkans. By and large, Serbia and the Balkans are seen as an area stirred by different cultures due to its geographical and political location. It was therefore difficult for the curators to categorize and distinguish Ottoman heritage in Serbia. This was due to their memory of a cultural “turmoil” and diversity that has always existed in the Balkans, as well as the difficulties in specifying Ottoman legacy and culture vis-à-vis Serbian culture.

For instance, Vladimir, Miroslav and Ana emphasized that Balkan had always been a crossroad where many people had passed through.

“Everyone that came left some traces in terms of culture. […] It’s difficult to tell you *what exactly* is Ottoman.”\(^ {166}\)

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163 The reader should be aware that these terms will be applied next to one another in the following parts of the analysis.
165 Interview with Vladimir, 23\(^{rd}\) of March, 2012.
166 Interview with Vladimir 23\(^{rd}\) of March.
Ana, on the other hand, claims that Serbia is roughly characterized by the segments of the “Old Balkan Tradition” which she explains, originated before the arrival of the Slavs. But she also mentions that Serbian culture was influenced by the Greeks as well as the Turks.

“It means that from the beginning, it has been a clash of cultures in this area and it’s visible in every aspect of the culture and tradition.”\(^{167}\)

This is also indicated by Miroslav:

> We are left with influences from whatever people or nation which came to the Balkans, now, in my opinion, this is not sufficiently accounted for in the historical literature. What is Byzantine [culture], what is Old Slavonic? What are the Oriental influences? There exist differences and it strains the generations of today. It has to be solved in the best manner. It is a big problem.\(^{168}\)

The curators also seemed to be reluctant to speak about Ottoman legacy with certainty because it was perceived as a more or less integral part of the Serbian culture by some of them. For Nikola it appeared to be difficult to say whether these “Oriental” influences could in fact be distinguished from what was Serbian. He emphasized that it was indeed something foreign, but which he now considered to be “ours”.\(^{169}\)

Sonja also expressed her perception of the Ottoman culture as manifested and internalized in her own culture. She is “living with that culture”, she told me.\(^{170}\) Such views illustrate that there was also a perception of the Oriental existing simultaneously aside to their indigenous culture. This “foreignness” is also an example of the informants’ viewpoints of the Oriental. The “Oriental influences” represents thus “‘Other’ vis-à-vis the museum’s presentation and memory of “the traditional” Serbian or orthodox culture.

Although Sonja expressed a certain distance between her culture and the Ottoman culture when saying that she is living with it, traces of tangible Ottoman culture were also treated and understood as “Oriental influences” in the Serbian “indigenous” culture. This is also exemplified in one of the museum pamphlets where it is stated that: “In the 14\(^{th}\) century came the invasion of the Ottoman Turks and the long years of their rule, which resulted in the introduction of Turkish and Oriental elements in the life and culture of the population in these regions.”\(^{171}\)

\(^{167}\) Interview with Ana, 27\(^{th}\) of March, 2012.
\(^{168}\) Interview with Miroslav, 5\(^{th}\) of April, 2012.
\(^{169}\) Interview with Nikola, 21\(^{st}\) of March, 2012.
\(^{170}\) Interview with Sonja, 3\(^{rd}\) of April, 2012.
\(^{171}\) The Ethnographic Museum, “Folk Culture on the Territory of SR Serbia”, museum pamphlet.
The text indicates a prior life and culture to that of the Turkish culture which existed in Serbia before the invasion of the Ottomans. However, the paragraph also signals that these influences and cultural elements are recognized as characterizing Serbian culture.

Some of the curators therefore had difficulties speaking about Ottoman legacy with certainty because it was perceived as a more or less integral part of the Serbian culture. “Hardly anyone can tell you what is Oriental and what is not, maybe with the exception of our colleagues who study Oriental culture at the Belgrade University“, Nikola said. 172

**Orthodox antiquity and roots of the Slavs**

By investigating the historical memory of the curators it might be possible to understand what conceptions the curator have about the Oriental and what meaning they attach to it. As Halbwachs suggests, memories express the general attitude of a group. Our personal interpretation of these memories can tell us about a phenomenon’s qualities and weaknesses. 173 I have showed in the previous section that the curators struggled to give a specific account of the Ottoman culture and legacy. One the other hand, the informants’ historical memories of the Ottoman rule share many common characteristics.

First and foremost, the memory of the Ottoman Empire as a foreign occupation was present among all of the curators although with different emphasis. Islam was also understood to be the most important attribution to their conception of “Orientalism.” It might even be possible to argue that Islam is the Oriental for the curators. This was evident as Islam particularly specified this period.

After conducting some of the first interviews, I started to realize that their memories of Ottoman culture in Serbia also were providing conclusions about their conceptions of Orthodoxy in Serbia and native culture. The Islamic Ottoman culture next to the Christian/Orthodox Slavic can be understood as conflicting. Islam was perceived as an oppressive power constellation in the Serbian society during the Ottoman rule and which hindered the Orthodox culture and people to flourish. This is important since it gives a good explanation for the treatment of the Ottoman as something “foreign” and, as I will argue, do not correspond to the traditional narrative of the museum.

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172Interview with Nikola, 19th of March, 2012.
The historical memories of the Ottoman period among the curators reflect two main interpretations of this legacy which have, according to Todorova, been present in the scholarly literature covering the Balkans. One of the common interpretations in scholarly work and elsewhere treats the Ottoman rule as an alien Islamic imposition on the Christian medieval society which existed at the time. The other more “organic” interpretation presents the Ottoman Empire as an Islamic extension of Byzantine culture and society in the region. The long duration of the Byzantine Empire was brought forward by Miroslav, Nikola and Vladimir which indicates a strong awareness of the Orthodox origin and life of the Serbs which existed prior to the Ottoman Empire.

The organic interpretation was expressed by Vladimir and Nikola. Vladimir told me:

> When the Turks came, Serbia was a part of the Byzantine Empire and what we today speak of as “Ottoman” is actually a mixture of elements of both Byzantine and Ottoman. The government remained the same as it was before their arrival together with the same praxis of the administrative structure.

He also suggests that the period of Ottoman rule in Serbia was a process of Islamization where the main important difference from Byzantine was the Islamic religion and their organization of the military. “All the rest remained the same.” “Byzantium lasted for one thousand years”, Vladimir added.

> “In the beginning the Ottomans saw themselves as successors of Byzantine Empire, not Christian, but Islamic successor of Byzantine,” Nikola tells me.

The understanding of Ottoman legacy as a complex symbiosis of Byzantine/Balkan traditions and Islamic/Ottoman traditions recognizes a high degree of integration of the cultures. However, this interpretation can also be understood as trivializing the importance of the five centuries of Ottoman rule.

The memory of Serbia always being Orthodox, however, or at least before the arrival of the Ottomans, was present among most of the curators.

In contrast to Vladimir and Nikola, Ana and Miroslav were more explicit in their conceptions of the Ottomans being intruders and who threatened the Orthodox traditions and structures.

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175 Interview with Vladimir, 23rd of March, 2012.
176 Interview with Vladimir, 23rd of March, 2012.
177 Interview with Nikola, 19th of March, 2012.
178 Todorova, *Imagining the Balkans*, 164-165.
They remembered the Ottomans as invaders which represented a break with the societal structure and traditions.\textsuperscript{179} Miroslav talked about Serbia as a developed Christian mediaeval state apart with Britain and Germany before the arrival of the Ottomans.\textsuperscript{180}

"In the middle ages, Serbia had as many inhabitants as there were in England. They had a government, they had laws […] It was part of the tradition of culture, politics and historical thought of the West."

Miroslav then emphasizes the negative consequences of the advent of the Ottomans:

“[…]The legacy of Europe and the Old Slavonic culture [Orthodox] which existed in the Middle Ages; the Turks interrupted that. It was an interruption of the society and we went in a direction opposite to that of Europe.”\textsuperscript{181} He then stressed that “the Turks did not bring anything good to the Balkans.”\textsuperscript{182}

For Ana the violence and wars which resulted from the Ottoman invasion contributed to impede the development and the organization of the society. She also viewed the end of communication which was caused by the advent of the Turks with Western Europe as a fatal consequence to progress similar to the rest of Europe.

“I don’t know what can be said to be an important legacy, but it is negative in that sense. It was a disruption to progress”,\textsuperscript{183} Ana stated.

These recollections addresses both the negative conceptions related to the advent of the Ottomans in the Balkans, as well as contrasting it to a more positive and prior “glorious” past. What is also important, however, is that the historical memory of all of the curators places the Orthodox culture and religion back to an historical time before the arrival of the Ottomans. These memories might help explaining why the Ottoman legacy is not perceived as traditional today. This results from the emphasis on the long duration of Orthodox traditions, and where the conception of Orthodox antiquity is vested in their historical memories. This might also be a sign of the importance attributed to the Orthodox culture for the Serbian social identity. Recollection of beginnings and origins are particularly important for the identity of nations and groups since it justifies the claim of groups having roots in a distant place.

\textsuperscript{179}Interview with Miroslav, 5\textsuperscript{th} of April, 2012, interview with Ana, 27\textsuperscript{th} of March, 2012.
\textsuperscript{180}Interview with Miroslav, 5\textsuperscript{th} of April, 2012.
\textsuperscript{181}Interview with Miroslav, 5\textsuperscript{th} of April, 2012.
\textsuperscript{182}Interview with Miroslav, 5\textsuperscript{th} of April, 2012.
\textsuperscript{183}Interview with Ana, 27\textsuperscript{th} of March, 2012.
sacred community.\(^{184}\) It is therefore possible to argue that the memories of the Ottomans as intruders and as an obstacle to the already existing Orthodox culture and tradition in Serbia, can explain why the Ottoman legacy does not surpass as “traditional culture” in the museum.

The importance of Slavic ethnicity was also emphasized by two of the curators, who pointed to the fact that the Muslims in Bosnia and in Sandžak\(^{185}\) were Slavs by origin. Nikola mentioned that the last name of the Muslims in Sandžak ended on „-iće“, which he noted was typical for Serbian and Croatian names.

“That is Slav people who accepted Islam,” Miroslav tells me.

Also, Miroslav considered the Bosnian Muslims to be a “hybrid people” and stressed that the Bosnian Muslims had changed their name two times during the last century - from Bosniaks to Muslims. “A people who have changed their name two times in less than hundred years, I am sorry, but can we consider that as a nation? [narod]”\(^{186}\)

Miroslav did not consider the Bonsians to be either Orthodox or Muslims, which was related to his knowledge that many people who had converted to Islam during the Ottoman rule also kept their Orthodox faith. He showed me a picture of a Turkish ibrik [Turkish coffee pot] from the 17th century which had a Christian cross carved on to it. “How could Islam be presented by a cross?” he asked me. Miroslav explained that the artisan who had made the pot had two faiths. “In order to have a job he accepted Islam.” From a field research Miroslav had performed in Bosnia he had also arrived to the conclusion that the Bosnian Muslims could not be considered as particularly religious either. “They had no idea about the Koran.”

As with Nikola, Miroslav also emphasized the Slavic origin of the Muslims by pointing to their last name. He told me that during the same field research in Bosnia, he had asked some of the Bonsian Muslims about their ancestors. When they had come to the grandfather on the father’s side of one of the informants, the latter expressed that his name was in fact “Petrović” which is a typical Serbian name.\(^{187}\)

The examples and stories above are important to emphasize as they also provide another example on the awareness of the ancientness of the Old Slavonic/Orthodox culture in the Balkans as a whole. The memory of the Orthodox culture and the ethnical Slavic origin of the

\(^{184}\)Zerubavel, “Recovered Roots”, 238, Smith, Chosen Peoples, 32.

\(^{185}\)A south-Serbian province which is largely populated by Muslims. It served as a Ottoman military-administrative unit during the Ottoman rule. Hupchick, The Balkans, xxxiii.

\(^{186}\)Interview with Miroslav, 5th of April, 2012.

\(^{187}\)Interview with Miroslav, 5th of April, 2012.
Muslims in the Balkans today can be interpreted as a way of delegitimizing the impact of Islam and its importance in the Balkans. Although Miroslav’s viewpoints might not have been shared by the other curators at the museum, they are nonetheless a part of the curators’ collective memory. What is important in this context is not, however, what Miroslav thought about the Muslims and whether he recognized them as a nation or not, but that the question of ethnicity and the long tradition of Orthodoxy was incorporated in the curators memory. Each of the personal interpretations of the advent of the Ottomans tell us about a past and society that existed prior to the Ottomans. The Ottomans are remembered to have brought Islam to the region, where it had no prior „roots“ in the Balkan peninsula compared to that of Orthodoxy. This is important to underline as it can explain some of the ambiguity towards the Ottoman heritage at the museum. I will return to the latter later in the analysis. In the next section I will argue that Islam has also come to represent a break with the Orthodox traditions by being forced upon the Balkan population.

**Turks as enemies and invaders**

The historical memory of Turks as enemies of the Serbs who suffered due to Islamic oppression, can also explain why the heritage from this period do not surpass as traditional culture. The memory of the Ottoman rule in Serbia was largely interpreted as a negative epoch in Serbian history.

Nikola recounted, for instance, a legend passed to him by his grandfather where the flight from the Turks was a theme.

> There is a legend; Serbians fighting the local Turkish authorities in the nineteenth century when the pressure on the farmers intensified as the Turks started to lose power and therefore tried to retrieve as much taxes as possible. The pressure was too hard on them, and the legend goes that they simply had to kill some of the local authority persons. [Turks] As a consequence, they had to flee to the woods to escape their revenge.\(^{188}\)

Nikola stressed however that as an anthropologist he perceived the story to be a “heroic tale” and remained doubtful whether the killings of the Turks ever took place. The story was told in order to create an image of Serbs as heroes, and not “chickens”, as he expressed it, fleeing as a consequence of the hard pressure.

\(^{188}\) Interview with Nikola, 21th of March, 2012.
Miroslav remembered the arrival of the Turks as an invasion followed by “genocide”. He could also tell me about his ancestors all the way back to the fifteenth century and he described how they had “to flee from the Turks”.

“It was an invasion! […] They destroyed everything. They first committed genocide in Serbia, not only in Serbia, but in all of the Balkan countries.[…] They took the women and children as prisoners, they killed people, they attacked…”

The negative attribution to their historical memory of this period in Serbia was overall not so explicit among the younger curators. Vladimir, Nikola and Ljilja told me instead that they were taught in school that the Turks were enemies of the Serbs, although questioning the negative representation. Ljilja also mentioned that she was sad to learn that her daughter had negative preconceptions towards Turkey and Turks as they were still portraying a negative image of this period in her daughter’s history classes.

“The Turks and the Germans have always been portrayed as the main enemies of the Serbians”, Vladimir tells me in one of the interviews, although he stresses that this should be considered a myth.

The enemy picture also stemmed from the memories of Serbs being slaves under the Ottomans. These perceptions could be traced back to the role of Islam during the rule of the Ottomans. The consequences of not being a Muslim and accepting Islam deprived the Orthodox Serbs for many rights. The Serbs did not have the opportunity to hold higher administrative positions as well as moving forward in the society unless they converted to Islam.

Ana particularly emphasized that the Serbs were slaves as they were part of the “rayah” under the Turks and commented that every nation should have its own freedom. The Christian Serbs during the centuries of Ottoman rule served as the “rayah” (flock) which was under serfdom and had to pay taxes to the Ottoman authorities. The “rayah” was the non-Muslim

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189 Interview with Miroslav, 5th of April, 2012.
190 Interview with Ljilja, 16th of March, 2012.
191 Interview with Vladimir, 23rd of March, 2012.
192 Interview with Ljilja, 16th of March, interview with Ana, 27th of March, interview with Miroslav, 5th of April, 2012.
193 Interview with Ana, 27th of March, 2012.
population [zimmis] in the society, and thus belonged to the lower strata and were accorded worse treatment than to that of the Muslims.  

This is also maintained by Nikola:

What we know is that it was feudalism. The Serbian population was ordinary farmers and they did not have the possibility to advance in the society. The idea of converting to Islam came to its fore, and the ones who accepted Islam as their religion could live a normal life.

Miroslav is more explicit: “They kept the Balkan people as slaves and with their Jihad they wanted to change the whole manner of life.”

Nikola’s perceptions of this period contrasts, however, to a large extent to the responses of Ana and Miroslav.

The Ottoman Empire was not that destructive as we were told in school […] You were free and you had the freedom of moving, freedom of life, but you were not the owner of the land. You always had to pay for the local authorities, the Aga. The sultan was the formal owner of the land.

Although there were different points of views attached to these historical memories, their memories from the Ottoman rule in Serbia were characterized by violence, hard conditions for the Orthodox Serbs which in turn led to upspring and an image of Serbia always being in a war-state with the Ottomans/Turks. The perceptions of intruders into the Old Slavonic culture is particularly interesting as it can explain the ideas of the Oriental existing alongside the native or “traditional” culture. The historical memories also portray the Ottomans as threatening the peace and stability that existed before the Ottomans arrival. However, the historical memories of the Ottoman Empire in Serbia were negotiated and questioned by some of the curators, which remained skeptical to what they had learned at school. Sonja also questioned the factuality of history and if it could ever be a true representation of past events.

195 Interview with Nikola, 19th of March, 2012.
196 Interview with Miroslav, 5th of April, 2012.
197 Interview with Nikola, 19th of March, 2012.
198 Interview with Nikola, 21st of March, Interview with Ana, 27th of March, Interview with Miroslav, 5th of April, 2012.
199 Interview with Sonja, 3rd of April.
5.3. Representation and treatment of the Ottoman heritage in the museum

In this section I will first present the treatment and perception of Ottoman heritage in the museum. I will show that the Ottoman heritage in Serbia is largely perceived and presented in the museum as “Oriental influences” in the Serbian “indigenous” culture. This corresponds with the master narrative of the museum as the exhibition is supposed to present only Serbian traditional culture. Therefore, the “Oriental”, although perceived and understood as something foreign, is by and large presented as a cultural attribute which the Serbian culture is “in possession of”. This, however, suggests that any alternative or counter memories of other cultures are attempted to be incorporated into the master narrative “Serbian traditional culture.” I will show that treatment of the Ottoman heritage in this manner indicates a lack of scientific treatment of the Ottoman heritage and Islamic culture.

“Not my topic”

The lack of scientific treatment of the Ottoman heritage in the museum was explicitly announced by the curators, since most of them told me this was “not their topic.” With the exception of Ljilja, all of the curators emphasized that they have never specifically concentrated on the “Oriental” influences in the Serbian culture. Some of the curators seemed actually rather puzzled by the fact that I wanted to focus on the Ottoman heritage in Serbia. The latter was something which in Nikola’s phrase did not need any “special consideration.” “The Ottoman heritage is part of the culture which you don’t have to emphasize in any specific way.”

Ana, whose area is folk costumes, mentions that whenever she reads literature related to her objects and collection, it is mostly literature which deals with the objects in general, be it costumes or crafts. She told me that she was not familiar with any specific literature on Ottoman history or anything considered being “Turkish”. “It’s not my topic of reflection”, she says.

When I asked if anyone specifically deals with the Ottoman legacy or Oriental legacy, she tells me that everything in the museum is divided according to topics such as economy,

200 Interview with Vladimir, 28th of March, Nikola, 19th of March, Ana, 27th of March, Sonja, 3rd of April.
201 Interview with Vladimir, 28th of March, Nikola, 19th of March, Ana, 27th of March, Sonja, 3rd of April.
202 Interview with Nikola, 19th of March, 2012.
203 Interview with Ana, 27th of March.
costumes, architecture, housing and so on, and that nobody specifically deals with “Orientalism”. This was also confirmed by Vladimir and Nikola. It was, therefore, apparent that the Ottoman heritage was not part of the museum’s theoretical and methodological framework.

“I personally have never dealt with culture in such a way that I would now look for any oriental influences in our culture or in detail researching the oriental”. For these reasons, I perceived the curators be talking from a personal instead of a strictly scientific point of view, when discussing the Ottoman heritage. This was emphasized and explicitly expressed by them.

Two of the curators, Ljilja and Vladimir, did however refer to Miroslav and told me that I should talk with him since he had been focusing on craftsmanship throughout his career. In their view this was an area where the influences from the Ottoman culture were most present. In general, craftsmanship was mentioned by all the curators as a branch of culture where the Ottoman influences are most evident. However, when I talked with Miroslav and asked him specifically about the influences on handicrafts he told me that they were, in fact, “very little.” According to him the only legacy could be traced in the naming of the tools. But as Miroslav explained to me; he had mostly worked in the villages and in the countryside and that there are very few traces of Ottoman legacy in these areas.

Interestingly, however, Miroslav’s answer ran counter to the perceptions of the other curators who, without exception, when asked about traces of Ottoman influences in the material culture, mentioned handicrafts as an important sphere of influence. It seemed somewhat odd that the one curator which had specifically dealt with this area could not confirm this.

A possible explanation concerns mainly the working relations at the museum which could be considered to be quite poor and where the exchange of views and opinions rarely took place. This was, however, certainly the case in relation to the topic of Ottoman influences in Serbian culture. Vladimir told me that discussions concerning Ottoman heritage had never taken place

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204 Interview with Ana, 27th of March.
205 Interview with Nikola, 19th of March.
207 Interview with Miroslav, 5th of April, 2012.
in the museum: “That [discussion] is something which doesn’t exist… That period is not properly dealt with in terms of museology in the Ethnographic Museum.”\textsuperscript{208}

This also became clear in one of the interviews with Nikola. He told me that they had once discovered some Arabic inscriptions on a door, when they had prepared it for an exhibition. He stressed, however, that the historic elements were not important in this particular context as the exhibition dealt with the meaning of doors and what they represent in the society. Consequently, where it came from or whatever wood it was made of were of less importance.

\textbf{Nikola:} In principle, like I told you, we seldom concretely think about what are the Ottoman influences.

\textbf{Me:} When you mentioned that you discovered some inscriptions in Arabic on one of the doors you exhibited, maybe then you discussed some of these influences?

\textbf{Nikola:} There was no discussion, we were just asserting the obvious. […] There were vegetal ornaments which we recognize and which we know from literature. […] I cannot come to think about any particular scientific conversation about Ottoman influences in our culture.\textsuperscript{209}

5.4. Tracing the Oriental legacy – The tangible culture and mental spaces

\textbf{A southern phenomenon}

Another possible explanation why the curators did not engage in any specific examination of the Ottoman heritage in the museum was that they regarded this cultural heritage to be more present in the south. When I was asking about the traces of Ottoman material culture, all of the curators regarded it to be more of an issue in the Sandžak region, together with Bosnia and Kosovo which were also particularly mentioned.\textsuperscript{210} In other words, it was not something which was considered to be most particular in Serbia. It was also suggested that I should travel to the south if I really wanted to study the Ottoman legacy. The curators told me that the Ottoman imprints were more evident in terms of architecture and organization of space, as well as the house interior. Ljilja also considered the “mentality” to be more „Oriental“ in Bosnia and Kosovo, than in Belgrade.

Their viewpoints might be explained by the fact that the Ottomans were longer present in the south of Serbia than in the north, as the first upspring started in 1805 and the northern part of Serbia gained some autonomy already in 1830, whilst the Ottomans did not leave indefinitely.

\textsuperscript{208} Interview with Vladimir, 28\textsuperscript{th} of March, 2012.
\textsuperscript{209} Interview with Nikola, 21\textsuperscript{st} of March, 2012.
\textsuperscript{210} Interview with Ljilja, 16\textsuperscript{th} of March, interview with Vladimir, 23\textsuperscript{rd} of March, interview with Sonja, 3\textsuperscript{rd} of April.
the south of Serbia and Kosovo until after the First World War.  

211 „The Danube was the border“, Ana tells me, emphasizing that the northern province, Vojvodina, for a long time was under the Austro-Hungarian Empire.  

212 This interpretation also reflects the history writing in the 19th century which, as argued earlier, was colored by the events that took place in this time period.

The differences between north and south are particularly evident in terms of architecture and organization of space, according to Nikola. He explains that houses in the south were placed next to one another and it was difficult to know “which is which.” He contrasts such architecture with big, open spaces and squares in the cities of Vojvodina. The difference was related to the ideas of Islam and the assertion of control in society. Nikola explains that by keeping the houses close to one another, with no open spaces, made it easier for the authorities to exercise control.  

213 Organization of space and architecture was also something which Ljilja mentioned as Ottoman heritage in Serbia, which she considered to be present in the southern parts of Serbia, together with Kosovo and Bosnia.

An Ottoman coffee house located in Požega Užička, Western Serbia. The picture is taken in 1934.  

212 Interview with Ana, 27th of March, 2012.
213 Interview with Nikola, 19th of March, 2012.
214 The picture is part of the Ethnographic Museum’s photography collection. It is included with the courtesy of the Ethnographic Museum.
Regardless of whether the Muslim population and the Ottoman cultural imprints are more visible and obvious in the Southern parts of the Balkan Peninsula, it appears, however, that according to these statements the Islamic culture or features do not suit the narrative and exhibition in the museum. The aim of the exhibition which is to present the unity of the Serbs, indicates that traces of other cultures and people do not serve any purpose in this regard.

“Oriental” mind-set

When I was asking for the Ottoman legacy in Serbian culture, however, it seemed to be somewhat easier for the curators to talk about the imprints the Ottoman rule have had on the Serbian “mind-set” than about the tangible culture. A recurrent theme in the conversations was the impact the Ottoman way of structuring the society on the social organization and “mentality” in Serbia today. Their interpretations of the legacy were by far a negative. Interestingly, their historical memories of past events were seen as sometimes direct and indirect related to present day societal structures in Serbia. The relationship between history and memory was therefore particularly at its fore when the curators ascribed the present meaning to their historical memory. The latter must be considered in terms of regarding memory as a phenomenon which takes place in the present. The meaning and value given to memory is molded and constructed by the present circumstances, while it also seeks to provide for continuity with the past.215 Interestingly, however, is that the perceptions of the curators in large reflect the hegemonic views of the Ottoman imperial legacy which Todorova claims have been promulgated in the Balkan historiography.216 Their views and perceptions correspond or even express the negative perceptions regarding the backwardness and less efficient attributes which characterize Balkan today. This also points to and in turn indicates a strong manifestation of the historical interpretations and negative attributes of “the Turks” which are present in the Serbian society.

In conversations with both Nikola and Ljilja, the relation between Ottoman feudalism and impact on the organization of family and peasant society were of importance. Nikola mentions that the “cult of family” is a characteristic of this period and something which is omnipresent in Serbian society today.

216Todorova, Imagining the Balkans, 162-169.
The Serbian peasant society is known for the organization of big families called “zadruga”. Even the expression “zadruga” has entered Western literature. It means big families which do not separate and they all stay together. They could be as big as containing up to 100 members, or 50-60 members. One married couple has two-three sons, then you have their wives and then their children, and in this way the family expands. These families form a community.

Ljilja, however, thinks of this as a negative legacy which today is manifested in the mind-set of the population. She pointed out that the strong personal relationships and unification in small family communities is an obstacle to a “higher” societal awareness.

“There is a lack of societal awareness and social capital. This is because of the social organization and the self-sufficiency of small family communities.”

“Everyone just works for their own good”, she adds.

Nikola connects the importance of family with the notion of “informal societies” which he considers to be an oriental characteristic. He however underlines that this should be considered as “free thinking” and not strictly scientific. Later he continues by saying:

Directly, this [informal] model is from the feudal peasant society and this peasant society was shaped during the middle century, medieval period, shaped by the oriental/Turkish society. […] This is something that is called “unmoral familization”, which means that I’m only following my own interests.

He then connects these characteristics to the problem of corruption:

We don’t have a clear idea what will be western market economy and what is based on relations, cousin relations, these informal relations like friendships. We don’t have a strict border between these relations. I mean, you can never have that, but in our society we have too much mixing of this.

Both Nikola and Ljilja therefore point out the problem of societal awareness due to the strong family communities, zadruga, which they perceive as a legacy of the Ottoman empire.

Vladimir also points to the “Oriental” outlook and communication as a legacy from the Ottoman period. He mentions what he perceives to be an oriental element in the Serbian society today which can also be compared to Nikola’s perceptions of “informality”.

There is a system. […] If you want to apply for a project you will get it depending on whether the director, if he is a guy, loves your blue eyes or whether he likes your breasts. That affects the decision. […] Now, this is really my prejudice, however.

217 Interview with Ljilja, 16th of March, 2012.
218 Interview Ljilja, 16th of March, 2012.
219 Interview with Nikola, 19th of March.
220 Interview with Vladimir, 23rd of March.
The Oriental elements were therefore by and large associated with negative societal matters in the Serbian society.

The negative perceptions of the “Oriental way of thinking” were also expressed in jokes and ridicules, especially in terms of matters which do not function particularly well in Serbia. One day I was standing with Nikola at a terrace. A colleague of his approached him and mentioned some problems they were having with the computer operative system. Nikola explained that the person who had been in charge of the software and computer system had gone away and so had all the passwords with him. They therefore had a problem in getting access to their computer system. Nikola, half joking, half serious said: “Now, that is Ottoman legacy!”

Even though it should be emphasized that Nikola was not being serious with this statement, it however serves an example of the negative associations connected with the Ottoman rule in Serbia. I have included this particular episode in the analysis since it gives a good picture of the perceptions of the Oriental being synonymous with the lack of organization, diffusion, laziness and impracticality. These are also, according to Todorova and Said, common characteristics of the Oriental.

Indeed, the relaxed character of the people in Serbia and the informal conception of time was a recurrent characteristic of the Oriental in the interviews with all of the curators. This certainly points to the collective awareness and memory of the curators in terms of the legacy of indecisiveness and laziness stemming from the Ottoman rule.

I told you today for example: “Let’s meet after 12.00 o’clock.” After 12.00 o’clock can mean eight o’clock in the evening, right? But you know that I will not be in the museum after eight o’clock, but for us that is a normal way of speaking, so to say. After 12, well, you will come whenever it suits you. This is one [oriental] influence which is not directly evident.

Their answers give a clear example of the strongly manifested negative conceptions regarding the Oriental influences in Serbia. What is also noticeable is that it seemed to be easier for the curators to attach meaning to the Oriental influences in the Serbian mind-set and societal structures than in the tangible heritage. This also leads me to the conclusion that the Ottoman heritage and legacy suffered from a lack of critical judgments and examination.

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221 Conversation with Nikola, 19th of March, 2012.
222 Todorova, Imagining the Balkans, 119.
223 Interview with Nikola, 19th of March, 2012.
Another interesting cultural legacy from the Ottomans, as viewed by my informants, is the preparing of Turkish coffee as well as many Turkish loans in the Serbian language.\textsuperscript{224} Even though these are important spheres of culture and should not be ignored, I would nonetheless argue that, these are more or less “well-known” influences which many people are acquainted with. All in all, I perceived the knowledge and impressions from this period to be more personal than strictly scientific. This was however also acknowledged by some of the curators themselves.\textsuperscript{225} This might also explain why it was easier to point to Ottoman influences in the cultural mind-set than to tangible and historical and cultural traces. What is of great significance, however, is that the curators mentioned that there had been no special classes or courses offered about this period and legacy during their university studies. It is apparent from their answers that the information they have on this period is gathered both from formal education, through research they have committed in relation to their work at the museum, as well as impressions collected in different situations in their life. On the question where he found literature on the Ottoman rule in Serbia, Vladimir answered:

\begin{quote}
That is just, like I told you, incidental. I have never directly dealt with the Ottoman influences; however, it is also in relation to my own experience; in relation to the house where I live, in the Cafes where I have been, in any case. It is […] something that I have gathered from my experiences. So, when I am faced with it I am thinking: ‘Aha! And this is Ottoman heritage.’\textsuperscript{226}
\end{quote}

As with Vladimir, Sonja also tells me that her knowledge of the Ottoman culture and history is collected from various impressions and sources throughout the years.

\begin{quote}
Studying, reading books, watching films; whatever is available. We have been learning about that more or less. I finished the faculty more than 30 years ago and I can’t exactly remember what literature it was, but there was literature. I performed research once on wedding customs in the Sjenica area [located in the Sandžak] where more than 50 per cent of the inhabitants are Muslims.\textsuperscript{227}
\end{quote}

Particularly Nikola and Miroslav emphasized that the historical sources of the Ottoman rule in Serbia were few and rare. Most noticeably, however; the National Library in Serbia burnt to the ground in 1941 as a consequence of the bombing by the Nazis during the Second World War. Thousands of manuscripts and holdings dating all the way back to the Middle Ages were destroyed.\textsuperscript{228}

\begin{footnotes}
\item[224] Interview with Nikola, 19\textsuperscript{th} of March, 2012, interview with Sonja 3\textsuperscript{rd} of April, Interview with Ana, 27\textsuperscript{th} of March.
\item[225] Interview with Nikola 19\textsuperscript{th} of March, 2012, Interview with Vladimir, 23\textsuperscript{rd} of March, 2012.
\item[226]Interview with Vladimir, 28\textsuperscript{th} of March.
\item[227] Interview with Sonja, 3\textsuperscript{rd} of April, 2012.
\end{footnotes}
Nikola insisted that by and large it was difficult to state anything with certainty.

First, it is not much written history about this. I know some things through the work and research I have committed, first and foremost about the Serbian peasant society. […] In that literature, however, it is clear that there is simply not much written evidence from this period. […] No one left any data.  

Even though the historical sources might be hard to obtain concerning the Ottoman rule in Serbia, it should not be ignored that the Ottoman heritage and culture was not, according to the curators, incorporated in the university curriculum when they were attending the university. This however, indicates the lack of interest of Islamic culture and heritage in Serbia in the overall educational and political branches of the society.

**Summing up – Memories vis-à-vis the treatment of Ottoman heritage in the museum**

The empirical examination above suggests that the historical memories of the Ottoman past in Serbia correspond well with the perceptions which I have discussed in Chapter two, under section 2.1. The curators therefore seem to share and take part of a collective memory of the Ottoman past. The role of individual interpretation and agency in relation to the collective memory is, however, also evident as the curators negotiate and question their historical memories in different ways. What is of particular interest is that the curators do not appear to engage in any discussions or conversations regarding the Ottoman culture at the museum. Furthermore, Nikola also emphasized that there is “no need” to specify and emphasize this heritage. This might also suggest that their memories of Ottoman history in the Balkans contain common denominators and makes it “needless” or uninteresting to engage in any conversation or discussion about this heritage. According to their answers it is apparent that the Ottoman heritage is not treated within a methodological and theoretical framework.

The empiric material does not directly point out any direct causal relationship between these memories and the presentation of the Ottoman heritage in the museum. There are however, plausible indicators that direct attention towards this tendency. As the museum is an institution which preserve, collect and portray what is cultural valuable in the museum, it is therefore a reasonable claim that the curators’ affect the understanding of what deserves protection and display. The curators’ common experiences and their interpretations of objects provide the fundament for their exhibition of culture, which in turn create expressions of

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229 Interview with Nikola 19th of March, 2012.
collective meaning to the public.\footnote{Crane, “The Conundrum of Ephemerality”, 99.} As Lowenthal argues, the portrayal of the past is a way of identifying it.\footnote{Lowenthal, The Past is a Foreign Country, 271.}

The social framework which the curators are a part of upholds and sustains the historical memories of this period, as there are no “positive” counter memories or alternative representations available. As previously mentioned, it is possible to suggest that the memory of Ottoman heritage also function as an opposing cultural segment which defines and distinguish the memory of Orthodox antiquity and exclusiveness. The historical memory of the Ottoman past is attributed with negative perceptions which one might argue also makes the Orthodox past and Old Slavic traditions even more glorious. As Marcel Proust notes in *Remembrance of Things Past*: “[b]etween the sparks of sun lie “vast stretches of oblivion.””\footnote{Lowenthal, The Past is a Foreign Country, 206.} The Ottoman legacy in the Serbian society reflects the “oblivion” as it is regarded as the “Ottoman yoke” which contrasts to the above mentioned sunny days.

A possible interpretation of the memories vis-à-vis the museum’ traditional narrative is that the Oriental influences are attempted integrated into the master-narrative. They are not, however, treated as influences which might signal or question the importance and role of Orthodoxy in Serbian culture.

The memories and awareness of a cultural diversity also provide explanations for the ambiguous treatment of the Ottoman heritage. Regardless of these counter memories, i.e. memories of other cultures, there is also a strong awareness of the ancient and long Orthodox traditions in Serbia.

**5.6 The curators as memory- and opinion makers**

The analysis has so far focused on the historical and collective memory of the Ottoman past and whether they provide an explanation for the lack of emphasis on the Ottoman heritage in the museum. Since exhibitions in any museum are the results of the curators’ work and interpretation, the theoretical assumption was that the collective memory of the curators would have an effect on the exhibition of culture in the museum. As curators are in the position where they can choose objects for presentation and therefore make decisions in regards of what “deserves” to be represented and recollected, the theoretical assumption was
that they have cultural authority in the society. As already mentioned in the introduction, people will believe what is presented to them in the name of authority.

By far, the curators’ responses portray a situation where the Ottoman heritage is excluded from scientific interpretation and investigation. However, it is not possible to understand the lack of attention to this heritage by only giving light to their remembrance of Ottoman legacy. These memories are crucial in order to understand the ambivalence and reluctance to present and incorporate this culture in the museum. However, what became particularly evident during the conversation with the curators was that they had very little authority and thus little impact on the museum practice. This is important to emphasize because the curators had less power and authority in terms of being “meaning makers” and “memory makers” than what was initially assumed before I embarked on the field research. By talking with the curators it became obvious that the hierarchical power structure in the museum, as well as the importance of party affiliation hindered the curators’ ability to affect the decision-making regarding exhibition and museum presentation. This was exemplified on several occasions as well as explicitly pronounced by more or less all the curators. On the question on how they regarded their importance as opinion makers in terms of cultural representation in the Serbian society, most of the curators said they did not have any authority. Vladimir and Nikola argued that in principle their position as curators should also be attributed with cultural authority, but only “if the museum functioned the way it is supposed to.” Since the museum is a public institution and is funded by the Ministry of Culture in Serbia, “guidelines” from political parties can be said to be more important for the practice and choice of exhibitions and research at the museum.

Ljilja and Nikola emphasized how the power of the curators depends on their political position, and not according to their qualities and professional skills. What was also mentioned by many of the curators was that the importance of party affiliation and loyalty came in the foreground for museological creativity and innovation. “I can be the best curator in the museum, but I might get fired if you have a problem with me.” Nikola also explained that the socialist legacy was still a big obstacle to innovation and progress in the Serbian society.

Interview with Nikola 19th and 21st of March, Interview with Ljilja, 16th of March, interview with Vladimir, 23rd and 28th of March, interview with Ana, 27th of March, interview with Miroslav, 5th of April, 2012.

Interview with Vladimir, 28th of March, 2012.

Interview with Ana, 27th of March, 2012.

Interview with Nikola, 19th March, 2012.
Creativity died during the age of socialism, not only in the Ethnographic Museum, but in terms of the museum practice in general. Why would I try to make something special and good, when I would be paid the same amount as someone who does not contribute at all?\footnote{Interview with Nikola, 19\textsuperscript{th} of March, 2012.}

More or less arbitrary allocation of power and positions also indicates that there is little connection between de facto power and formal position. Ana, who held a position as a museum councilor, told me for instance that she had no authority what so ever over the organization and practice at the museum. That was left to the director of the museum and the museum administration.\footnote{Interview with Ana, 27\textsuperscript{th} of March, 2012.}

Since the curators had little ability to affect the museum practice, one may wonder whether the importance of their memory of Ottoman past makes any difference at all. The personnel in the museum were largely appointed due to their political loyalty and not as a result of their professional qualities. This created tensions and poor relations, and can explain the lack of emphasis, not just in terms of Ottoman legacy, but on innovation of the museum practice as a whole.

This power structure and the political culture is too complex to be treated in full in this thesis, however, it is impossible to go around the political circumstances in order to grasp the lack of initiative and confrontation with present museum practice. What is important to emphasize, however, is that in such a working environment where decisions are top-down and where there is little room for creative independency outside the political party structure, a politicized issue such as Ottoman heritage has few chances to be represented. This was exemplified in one of the interviews with Vladimir. When I asked him why they did not have more meetings with the curators and more discussions concerning the museum practice, he told me that this was not favored by the administration because people will start to ask “difficult questions.”\footnote{Interview with Vladimir, 28\textsuperscript{th} of March, 2012.}

If there would be a meeting and people starts asking questions, for instance about the Ottoman heritage, it will get problematic when people ask why we don’t portray more of this culture. The question then arises: Why haven’t we done this sooner and in the course of the last hundred years?\footnote{Interview with Vladimir, 28\textsuperscript{th} of March, 2012.}

However, Vladimir also emphasized that there was “no need” to start any discussions about the Ottoman culture or question any current museum display at the museum since the public profile and position of the museum is “Serbian traditional culture.” He mentioned that he and a colleague had been faced with difficulties and complications in relation to an exhibition
which could be regarded as “more contemporary”, since it dealt with the usage of plastic in Serbia during the nineties. The exhibition, he said, portrayed Serbia in a less attractive light and the exhibition was not popular among many of the colleagues at the museum.

“Ottoman culture is even more far away from [their] conceptions of traditional culture. It is complicated.”

He also explained how a previous exhibition during the 90s which focused on the battle of Kosovo in 1389 would stand in a stark contrast to any museum practice which would now portray the Ottoman legacy in a more friendly light. This would entail contradictions in terms of the narrative of the museum and previous exhibitions of traditional culture. It, however, also exemplifies one of the contradictions of heritage promotion and promoters, who, in Lowenthal’s words, “feel obliged to confirm popular error.” Lowenthal states that ““Medieval” performers play Renaissance music on sixteenth century shawms and regals because these later sounds and instruments exemplify what hearers mistake for medieval.”

“In fact, many people consider something to be Ottoman or Turkish which is not,” Vladimir also told me.

Interestingly, all of the curators, with the exception of one, mentioned a popular Turkish soap opera in Serbia called “Suleiman the Magnificent” in the conversations I had with them. The TV-show was mentioned by many of the curators as an example of a popular channel of information about the Ottoman Empire. They told me that many people in Serbia, who in general, according to the curators, know little about the Turkish influences in the society, realized after watching this TV-show that Serbian culture shares many characteristics with the contemporary Turkish culture. Interestingly, the TV show also came up in an incidental conversation at the terrace with a woman who renovated the museum halls. When the woman heard that I was speaking with Nikola about the Ottoman legacy or Oriental elements in Serbia, she immediately joined the conversation and told me that she used to watch the Suleiman TV-show and she had therefore discovered many similarities between Serbian and Turkish culture.

241 Interview with Vladimir, 28th of March, 2012.
242 Interview with Vladimir, 28th of March, 2012.
244 Lowenthal, “Fabricating Heritage”, 13.
245 Interview with Vladimir, 23rd of March, 2012.
Nikola mentioned in one later interview, although with a lack of contentment however, that some of his curator colleagues in the museum also had encouraged him to watch the television show as they were fascinated and surprised to see so many similarities there are between Serbian and the present Turkish culture.\textsuperscript{246}

Considering the lack of interest and attention towards the Ottoman cultural heritage and legacy in the Serbian culture in the Ethnographic Museum, I was not too surprised to learn that many people in Serbia learned about the culture through Turkish television shows.

The results of this inquiry, both in terms of the curators’ memory, as well as their attitude and perceptions towards this legacy are however not straightforward. From the few cases which are selected for this analysis there are some differences in the curators’ attitudes and interpretations of this legacy, as well as meanings attached to their historical memories. Some of the curators mentioned that it would be interesting to portray and exhibit more of the Ottoman legacy and devote more attention towards this issue, however, there were no efforts at all to realize these claims.\textsuperscript{247} It can largely be explained by the hierarchical power structure where the curators’ ability to affect and influence the museum practice is very limited.

It should also be emphasized that it was obvious that there existed a conflict and disagreement concerning the presentation and exhibiting of culture in the museum. Some of the curators expressed the need for modernizing the museum practice and departing from the traditional ethnological discipline which favors origin and antiquity instead of introducing new museological approaches.\textsuperscript{248}

\textsuperscript{246} Interview with Nikola, 21\textsuperscript{st} of March, 2012.
\textsuperscript{247} Interview with Vladimir, 23\textsuperscript{rd} of March, 2012, interview with Sonja, 3\textsuperscript{rd} of April, 2012.
\textsuperscript{248} Interview with Nikola 19\textsuperscript{th} of March, 2012, Interview with Vladimir. 23\textsuperscript{rd} and 28\textsuperscript{th} of March, 2012.
CHAPTER SIX

6.0. Conclusion: The Ethnographic Museum as a site of memory

The present looks back at some great figure of an earlier century and wonders. Was he on our side? Was he a goodie? What a lack of self-confidence this implies; the present wants both to patronize the past by adjudicating on its political acceptability, and also be flattered by it, to be patted on the back and told to keep up the good work.” Julian Barnes. Flaubert’s parrot.249

The intention with this thesis was to give the reader further insight to the treatment of Ottoman legacy in the Ethnographic Museum and to present the museum as a channel of memory which have the potential to impact and shape the interpretations of Serbian collective identity. In terms of the first part of the research question: “How is the Ottoman past remembered among the curators,” I have showed that the memories of the Ottoman rule in Serbia and legacy correspond to the negative perceptions presented in Chapter 2, section 2.1. Scientific treatment and examination of the Ottoman heritage is also avoided and excluded from scientific interpretation and investigation. No one sought to provide for any detailed and specific inquiry of Ottoman culture and impact in Serbia. This was also apparent in the exhibition of culture in the museum which incorporated the perceived “Oriental” influences into the conception of Serbian traditional culture. The overall exhibition and information given about Ottoman culture was however scarce and unspecific and did not provide for any new historical perspectives or interpretations which challenge the already existing negative perceptions of Ottoman heritage.

Following my argumentation throughout the thesis, my conclusion from this inquiry is that the Ethnographic museum as a site of memory transmits and sustains the oblivion and neglect of the Ottoman heritage. Potential visitors of the current exhibitions are not presented with any alternative and new perspective regarding the Ottoman impact and heritage in Serbia.

In regards to the second part of the research question, namely; the relationship between these memories and the presentation of Ottoman culture in the museum; the importance of the curators’ historical memory can explain the lack of interest and focus of this heritage. The curators’ historical memories in large portray the Ottoman rule in Serbia a negative period in Serbia. Some of the curators view the Ottoman Empire as a foreign imposition which threatened the life and culture of Orthodox and Old Slavonic culture in Serbia.

249 Lowenthal, The Past is a Foreign Country, 325.
association of Orientalism and Islam was in large, thus, understood as standing in contrast to their memories of traditional life and culture of Serbs. The collective identity and memory of traditional culture is not associated with Ottoman or Islamic culture, but instead orthodox culture and tradition. These memories therefore have an explanatory power in terms of accounting for the insufficient attention the Ottoman heritage was given in the museum.

This causal relationship is not, however, straightforward. The personal interpretations and memory of the curators cannot alone explain the lack of scientific treatment. The issue of “politics of memory” is also at stake in the museum. It was clear that there was a lack of influences from the curators onto the administration of the museum. It is necessary to direct attention to the political culture in Serbia which constrains alternative influences outside the party structure. The personnel in the museum were largely appointed due to their political loyalty and not as a result of their professional qualities. The tensions and poor relations in the museum were in large affected by this situation, and can explain the lack of emphasis, not just in terms of Ottoman legacy, but of innovation of the museum practice as a whole. The findings also call for attention and confrontation of political structures which continue to reinforce and sustain these practices.

As a consequence of these findings the impact of the Ministry of culture and political parties in the decision making process must also be taken into consideration when making any assumptions between the correlations and causal effects in the presentation of culture in the museum. Therefore, the model presented in the introduction has been attributed with some modifications:
One of the most important findings, however, is that the ambivalence and reluctance to investigate these matters further might also stem from the lack of knowledge and consequently, interest in this heritage. It was clear that very few of the curators had engaged in any scientific inquiries regarding Islamic material culture and history, and that these matters were not part of their university studies. This also indicates the importance of investigating memories further in communities where records of past events rely heavily on memory in the transmission of heritage. When these memories remain unchallenged, however, they can serve as an obstacle to new historical perspectives which might facilitate liberation from “outworn rules and age-old tyrannies.”

Due to the lack of awareness and emphasis in the museum on the Ottoman heritage and meaning in the Serbian society, it is therefore evident that the museum as a site of memory does little to provide for an arena where memories of other cultures and identities are channeled and presented in the society. As Serbia is and has been a multicultural society for centuries, the time is ripe for a presentation of memories of culture which would be incompatible with the national narrative and myths about the exclusivity of the Serbian nation. New historical perspectives can lay ground for new interpretations of the past and help us seek out a new path and provide for tolerance and understanding between different ethnic communities. A nuanced and scientific treatment of the Ottoman heritage and a public presentation of new perspectives can in turn shake off the dependence and importance of

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myths in historical interpretation.\textsuperscript{251} The museum practices in the Ethnographic Museum, however, do not currently leave the ground open for such an opportunity.

\textsuperscript{251} Lowenthal. \textit{The Past is a Foreign Country}, 411.
**Literature**

**Books**


**Chapters in edited volumes**


**Journal Articles**


**Website**


**Newspaper article**


**Information material**

Cultural Heritage Without Borders, “The Western Balkan Regional Museum Network”, *pamphlet*.

The Ethnographic Museum in Belgrade, “Folk Culture on the Territory of SR Serbia in the 19th and 20th Centuries”, Museum pamphlet.


**Paper presented at a conference**


**Dissertation**

Appendix

Map 1.

Map 5. Ottoman Expansion in the Balkans, 1354–1566

252 Hupchick, The Balkans, xxii.
Map 2 Ottoman rule and conquest

Map 7. Emergence of Balkan States, 1830–1862

Map 3

254 Hupchick, The Balkans, xxv.
## Informants

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<tr>
<th>Name</th>
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<td>Structured/semi structured interview</td>
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<td>Vladimir</td>
<td>Structured/Semi structured interview</td>
<td>1. 23.03.2012</td>
<td>Roughly edited transcript</td>
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<td>2. 28.03.2012</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ana</td>
<td>Semi structured interview</td>
<td>27.03.2012</td>
<td>Roughly edited transcript</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sonja</td>
<td>Structured interview</td>
<td>03.04.2012</td>
<td>Full transcript</td>
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<tr>
<td>Miroslav</td>
<td>Semi structured interview</td>
<td>05.04.2012</td>
<td>Roughly edited transcript</td>
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<tr>
<td>Vilma Niškanović</td>
<td>Conversation in her office</td>
<td>11.03.2012</td>
<td>Field notes</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Questions for the curators, Serbian version

Pozadina kustosa:

Odakle ste, gde ste se školovali i kakvo vam je radno iskustvo u muzeju?

Kako ste se odlučili da studirate kulturno nasleđe?

Čime se bavite u muzeju?

Nasleđe Osmanljia:

Da li smatrate da danas još uvek postoji nasleđe Osmanlija Srbiji? Ako je to slučaj, šta mislite da je najvažnije da predložimo tom smislu? (na primer, može biti vezano za kulturu, hranu, arhitekturu, demografiju, politiku itd.)

Kakvo je vaše mišljenje o tom periodu u Srbiji? Koliko znate o tome?

Po vašem mišljenju, kakav značaj ima osmanlijsko carstvo u spskom društvu danas?

Kad ste počeli da razmišljate o uticaju osmanlija u Srbiji? (na primer, da postoje neke stvari od Turaka)

Koliko često razmišljate o tome i u kojim situacijama? Da li razmišljate o tome i van posla?

Da li ste ikada i na koji način suočeni sa osmanlijskim nasleđem na poslu?

Da li diskutujete o tome na poslu sa svojim kolegama?

Da li ste ikada zapitali da li kultura srpskog naroda ima sličnosti s kulturom Turaka? Da li ste uzeli ovo u obzir prilikom pripremanja zbirk? 

Na osnovu čega birate objekte za zbirku?

Da li ste zauzimali stav (subjektivno mišljenje) prema tome prilikom izrade zbirk?

Da li smatrate da vaša posicija kao kustos ima uticaj na stvaranje slike srpskog kultura u društvu?

Gde ste prikupljali informacije o osmanlijskom carstvu? Da li ste sa tim upoznali tokom studiranja ili preko neke posebne literature? Koliko je validna dostupna literatura?

Da li neko od vaše rodbine ima podatke o tom periodu s kolena na koleno?
Questions for the curators, English version

**Background of the curators**

Where are you from, where did you go to school/faculty and how do you consider the working environment in the museum? (How is your work experience in the museum?)

Why did you decide to study cultural heritage?

What do you do/what are your working tasks in the museum?

**Ottoman heritage:**

In your opinion, are there any traces today of Ottoman legacy in Serbia? If that is so, in your opinion, what are most important to suggest in that sense? (For example, it can be related to culture, food, architecture, demographics, politics. Etc.)

How do you consider this particular period in Serbia? How much do you know about it?

In your opinion, what meaning does the Ottoman Empire have today in the Serbian society?

When did you start to think about the influences of the Ottoman Empire in Serbia? (For example, that some things derive from the Turks.)

How often do you think about it? In which situations? Do you think about it when you are not at work?

Have you ever encountered Ottoman heritage through your work and while working at the museum?

Do you discuss this heritage at work with your colleges?

Have you ever asked yourself if the Serbian culture share similarities with the Turkish culture? Have you ever taken this into consideration when preparing for exhibitions?

How do you choose objects for your collection?

What position do you take towards this heritage when working with the collections and exhibition?

Do you consider that your position as a curator have an impact on the creation and presentation of Serbian culture in the society?

Where did you gather information about the Ottoman Empire? Did you learn about it while studying or through other specific literature? Do you consider the literature/sources which are available to be valid?

Did any of your family members ever told you any stories or provided you with information about the Ottoman period in Serbia?