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Post-Yugoslav Constellations

Archive, Memory, and Trauma in Contemporary Bosnian, Croatian, and Serbian Literature and Culture

Edited by
Vlad Beronja and Stijn Vervaet

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Introduction

After Yugoslavia – memory on the ruins of history

During the last twenty years, the Yugoslav successor states have been undergoing substantial political, social, and economic changes that have inevitably left their impact on the cultural life of the region. In contrast to the rest of Eastern Europe, where non-violent revolutions following the fall of the Berlin Wall secured a largely peaceful transition from state socialism to liberal democracy, Yugoslavia experienced a rise of violent nationalism in its respective republics, eventually culminating in a series of brutal and drawn-out wars, the worst Europe has seen since the Second World War. The Socialist Federative Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRY), a largely secular, multicultural welfare state with a "soft" socialist system that incorporated elements of capitalism, quickly splintered into seven different, mutually antagonistic nation-states, which after a period of wartime nationalism in the 1990s have gradually accepted the Western model of democracy and free market economy. However, the fact that three different "regimes of truth," namely, "the types of discourse [society] harbors and causes to function as true," (Foucault 1977, 14), have radically altered in the period of two decades – from self-management socialism to nationalism to Western-style democracy – points to a dominant historical trend in the twentieth-century Balkans, a region that has been a crucial strategic and ideological battleground in both the First and the Second World War. Crucially, these three different regimes of truth went hand in glove with specific use(s) of history, that is, different ways of performing collective memory for the sake of a specific identity politics and the construction of usable pasts (Sindbæk 2012).

This volatile, complex, and often traumatic experience of twentieth-century history and memory has subsequently been recorded in contemporary literature, film, and popular culture in Bosnia, Croatia, and Serbia, keeping pace with and even anticipating worldwide experiments in form, genre, medium, and style. Evidence of this avant-garde attitude can be found in the mixed-media novels of Daša Drndić, Dubravka Ugrešić, Saša Ilić and Aleksandar Hemon; in the experimental theater of Oliver Frljić, web-based projects such as Cyber Yugoslavia and *The Lexicon of Yu Mythology*; the performances, photographic, and multimedial projects by Milica Tomić, Marijan Crtalić, Igor Grubić, Sandra Vitaljić, Siniša Labrović, and Vladimir Miladinović; as well as in the activities of radical artistic col-

lectives such as The Monument Group; and in the graphic narratives of Aleksandar Zograf, among many others. Combining textual, material, and visual elements into new totalities, these cross-genre and multimedia works explicitly question the boundaries between site-specific "hard memory," such as monuments and museums, and deterritorialized "soft memory," such as novels and memoirs (Etkind 2004). Moreover, literary, performative, and visual works of this type have been frequently produced in opposition to the "official," ideologically approved historiography – a dominant source of political legitimacy for both communism and atavistic nationalism (Bell 2008) – creating politically charged counter-memories and marginalized archives. Due to the socially embedded albeit frequently agonistic nature of these critical memorial practices, the essays in this collection inevitably traverse disciplinary boundaries, moving from formal readings to sociological, anthropological, political, and activist frameworks that bring to the fore the progressive and transformative power of memory. Thus, while memory in the Balkans has often been described as binding, authoritative, and non-negotiable (Bet-El 2002), functioning as a banner of war, we want to challenge this one-dimensional representation and offer a more nuanced analysis that accommodates frequently ignored instances of international solidarity, shared dialogue, communal mourning, and working through a difficult past. Moving beyond the methodological nationalism of studies that focus solely on Serbian, Bosniak, or Croatian literature, film, and visual art, this volume complements recent studies that from a supra-national angle examine post-Yugoslav literature and film (Gorup 2013, Crnković 2012), visual culture (Šuber and Karamanić 2012), and politicized artistic practices (Šuvaković 2012). At the same time, the present collection takes a more specific approach by focusing on a broad range of memorial practices, especially on the ways in which cultural memory is mediated, performed, and critically reworked by literature and arts in the region of the former Yugoslavia.

As recent studies have shown, cultural memory is not bound to specific sites or merely "contained" and "transported" by media – cultural memory circulates from one medium to another (from fictional and non-fictional stories to photos, to monuments, to commemorative ceremonies, to souvenirs), between social groups, and through plurimedial networks outside as well as below the level of the state (Erll and Rigney 2009). The present volume illustrates and underscores this dynamic nature of cultural memory in that it brings together essays examining a wide range of critical cultural practices, ranging from literature, theater, film, comics, over painting, visual art and photography, to websites and social media such as Facebook and YouTube. By focusing on the former Yugoslavia as a supranational case, the present volume joins memory scholars who

have argued for the need of a transnational turn in memory studies (De Cesari and Rigney 2014).

Finally, because the volume focuses on a region of Europe that has been going through turbulent changes from wartime nationalism, with strong authoritarian and populist tendencies, to liberal democracies that are at least nominally, if not substantially, invested in securing a pluralist and open society, the volume also could make an interesting and meaningful contribution to debates on a shared European memory and supranational identity. Indeed, as Ann Rigney has argued, "the historical importance of national thought on the 'old' continent means that the current state of Europe is making visible in particularly urgent ways the need for new intellectual and imaginative tools with which to articulate postnational identities" (2012, 609). In similar manner, intellectuals such as Dubravka Ugrešić and Boris Buden have shown the limits of identity politics and multiculturalism in the West, which, akin to nationalism, often work to erect fixed boundaries between cultures, thereby fragmenting potential supranational solidarities based on class (Ugrešić 2008, 2014; Buden 2004). Certain authors in this collection echo these insights, pointing to the stigmatized legacy of socialism as a starting point for introducing class struggle, worker's rights, and publicly owned space into the vocabulary of collective memory. No less important is the search for new, reparative, and transformative spaces of mourning, especially if we consider the historical and recent instances of slaughter and ethnic cleansing not only in the former Yugoslavia but also in Europe as a whole. The danger here seems to be a traumatic foreclosure of national identity, a politics of affect, which in Wendy Brown's words, "enunciates itself, makes claim for itself, only by entrenching, dramatizing, and inscribing pain in politics and can hold out no future – for itself or others – that triumphs over this pain" (1993, 406). By not only focusing on traumatic memories but also exploring the ways in which post-Yugoslav cultural practices mobilize memory for a politics of hope, this volume moves beyond the trauma paradigm that still to a large extent dominates the field of memory studies. Specifically, the present collection points at ways of dealing with a shared supranational past that show the relevance of the cultural memory of "Eastern European" citizens and the contribution they can offer to the building of Europe's shared cultural memory and transnational identity.

Three regimes of memory

Following Tito's break with Stalin and the Cominform in 1948, Yugoslavia developed its own socialist politics based on the ideology of non-alignment with a dis-

tinct teleological historical narrative centering on Tito's communist Partisan movement and its accompanying rhetoric. Specifically, the construction of collective memory in socialist Yugoslavia revolved around the traumas of the Second World War and followed the communist dictum of "brotherhood and unity" ["bratstvo i jedinstvo"]. Monuments to the fallen heroes of the partisan revolution and to the victims of fascism were erected across the country, and in addition to novels, partisan films became the most popular medium to disseminate this historical narrative, which, like two sides of the same coin, had both a heroic and a martyrological face.[1] While the "official" Yugoslav historical narrative of the Second World War centered on heroic acts of communist partisan resistance against the Nazi occupiers, it simultaneously aimed to smooth over the (memory of the) ethnic tensions that had so violently disrupted this multinational country during the war.[2] Certainly, the way in which Yugoslav society dealt with the traumatic legacy of the Second World War, including the interethnic massacres that happened during the war, evolved over time and was far from homogenous in both form and content.[3]

The early 1980s saw the breakdown of the communist master-narrative about the Second World War, and from the mid-1980s onwards, the rise of different national (Serbian, Croatian, Slovene, for example) revisionist historiographies took the shape of aggressive nationalist and mutually competing victim-centered narratives that introduced the theme of genocide (of the own national group) to the larger public (Sindbaek 2012, 139 – 188). The obsession with genocide led, to borrow an expression from Dirk Moses, to a real "terror of history" (2011): a war about history that was played out on the pages of newspapers, on the radio and television and that, because of its strategic dissemination in mass media, paved the road to the wars of the 1990s and even further entrenched

1 For a good overview of the state-sponsored remembrance of the Second World War in socialist Yugoslavia in general and for the role of monuments in particular, see Karge (2010). For the hero/martyr dichotomy in Yugoslav socialist prose and poetry about the Second World War, see Kazaz (2009). For a nuanced view of the role of popular culture and mass media in the socialist memory politics of the Second World War, see Jambrešić-Kirin (2004).

2 In essence, this state-supported collective narrative refused to acknowledge the victims of the Second World War in ethnic terms: all victims of the war, regardless of whether they had died as political opponents fighting the Nazis or whether they were killed because of their ethnicity (that is, as victims of the Holocaust, or as victims of the genocide against Serbs, Jews, and Gypsies perpetrated by the Ustashe in the Independent State of Croatia), were subsumed under the larger category of "victims of fascism" (žrtve fašizma) (Kerenji 2008, 179 – 185).

3 See Sindbæk (2012) for a helpful periodization and careful discursive analysis of the evolution of the way in which Yugoslav historiography, media, and (popular) literature and culture thematized the inter-Yugoslav massacres that happened during the Second World War.

antagonistic ethnic identities (Gagnon 2004; Žarkov 2007). As Katherine Verdery (1999) has shown, the fall of communism in Eastern Europe thus resulted in not only a dramatic transformation of the economic system but also in a wholesale reorganization of time and space, which was symbolically reenacted through the entrance of dead bodies into politics. In Yugoslavia specifically, the reburial of key historical figures and nameless dead was tied to territorial pretensions of individual republics and a re-establishment of uninterrupted continuity with precommunist national histories, which entailed an active suppression of the socialist past and hence of an extensive period of interethnic coexistence (Verdery 1999, 95–127). Due to their excessive violence and strategic targeting of civilian populations through ethnic cleansing, the Wars of Yugoslav Secession only created new ethnically marked dead bodies and collective traumas, usable pasts around which the successor states organized their new grammars of national memory.

The post-Yugoslav present, however, is also seeing signs of disappointment with the nationalist euphoria that characterized the decade of the 1990s, with rising unemployment, political corruption, and undelivered promises of a better future that indicate a prolonged transition without an end in sight (Pupovac 2010). It is in this context of uncertainty and lack of future prospects that Yugonostalgia – the various forms of nostalgia that the memory of the socialist era evokes in the inhabitants of former Yugoslavia and the role of popular culture in these processes – has attracted, over the past few years, considerable scholarly attention (Volčič 2007, Velikonja 2008, Luthar and Pušnik 2010, Bošković 2013). However, it is only recently that anthropologists and sociologists have argued that nostalgia can be oriented towards the future and recognized the political potential of Yugonostalgia to produce hopeful visions of a better one (Palmberger 2008; Petrović 2012). Similarly, philosophers have emphasized the political relevance of Yugoslavia's socialist and antifascist legacy for post-Yugoslav societies today (Kirn 2012) and suggested that (post-)Yugoslav culture can play an emancipatory role in mediating this legacy (Buden 2009).

Why post-Yugoslav constellations?

Our usage of the "post-" in post-Yugoslav should be understood to mirror both the (violent) break between socialist Yugoslavia and what came after it, as well as a certain continuity of its cultural, political, and social legacy. Here, we follow Marianne Hirsch's explanation of the prefix "post-" in "postmemory" – as a prefix that, not unlike the post- in postmodernism, not only indicates a mere temporal sequel, a discontinuity or gap between the modern and the post-

modern, but also stresses at the same time the ongoing influence of the former on the latter and the profound relationship between the two (Hirsch 2012, 5). This continuity is often unwillingly acknowledged or fiercely negated by the ruling nationalist political and cultural elites, who continue to engage in nation-building processes based on ethnopolitics because this is the only way they can stay in power. The political boundaries notwithstanding, we perceive this continuity as embodied both in the existing shared cultural and linguistic space as well as in the enduring inspiration artists and critics find in socialist Yugoslavia as a failed albeit not fully exhausted revolutionary project.

This volume presents a critical account of the diverse and dissonant voices that make up the contemporary cultural landscape of Bosnia, Croatia, and Serbia. Inspired by Walter Benjamin's "constructive principle" in his "Theses on the Philosophy of History," we imagine these cultural practices as forming *critical constellations* that "blast open the continuum of history," thereby recovering the memory of struggle, oppression, and utopian horizons from what Benjamin calls the "homogenous, empty time" of progress (Benjamin 1968, 261). In other words, critical cultural practices such as literature, film, and performance art integrate a dynamic and open-ended experience with and of history, which traditional historiography all too frequently chooses to ignore or, even worse, deliberately silences and suppresses.

On the one hand, these works of art and literature acknowledge the *mediated* character of memory, which they foreground through experimentation with formal devices and the use of new media. Conversely, experimental forms and new media technologies enable precisely the critical interaction of different times, spaces, memories, and histories to (e)merge within a single cultural text. The present volume explores this interaction between different media and the coexistence of temporalities in the unstable and ever-changing present. Furthermore, it focuses on histories and memories that have not been acknowledged or sufficiently "worked through," as well as the presence of marginalized voices – those of women, ethnic minorities, transnational and exilic subjects – within dominant national(ist) frameworks. Understanding cultural memory as a performative engagement with the past, the volume draws attention to works of art that function as alternative archives, which do not merely contest the dominant (ethno-nationalist or neo-liberal) narratives of the past and the present but help to imagine new forms of community and identity for the future. Thus, the volume contributes to recent developments in memory studies, which have seen a shift in focus from static to dynamic models of cultural memory: from storage (Pierre Nora's "lieux de mémoire") to circulation; from the view of "media as passive conveyors of information" to an understanding of the necessarily mediated character of practices of remembering (Erll and Rigney 2009).

Moreover, by focusing on works that move away from a "zero-sum" conception that perceives memory as necessarily linked to or even owned and inherited by a specific national, ethnic, or religious group, the essays in this volume foreground the potential of post-Yugoslav works of art to transcend national and ethnic boundaries and to imagine new forms of transnational solidarity and cosmopolitan citizenship (in line with Rothberg's multidirectional memory, 2009).

Entangled legacies of extreme violence

The first section gathers essays that analyze post-Yugoslav works of literature and art dealing with difficult historical legacies, most prominently the memory of the wars of the 1990s. Internationally renowned novels by Ozren Kebo (see Postema), Saša Stanišić and Ismet Prcic (see Biti), Saša Ilić, Daša Drndić, and Irfan Horozović (see Vervaet), to name a few, mobilize precisely constellations of traumatic history and memory in a way that enables mourning and working through a difficult past. Visual art, photography, sculpture, performance (see Potkonjak and Pletenac), and theater (see Jakiša) also prove to be productive ways of bringing sensitive issues into the public sphere, urging audiences to confront the difficult legacies of the violence of the 1990s. As the essays in this section show, these memory works emerge in opposition to what Aleida Assmann has called the ethnocentric "grammars of individual and national memory" (2006, 62), practices of remembering which project an exclusively narcissistic image of the nation, refusing to acknowledge popular consent to criminal regimes and legacies of extreme violence towards the nation's historical others.

The opening chapter by Antje Postema examines the complex relations between narrative documentation and memorialization in Ozren Kebo's *Sarajevo for Beginners*, a well-known collection of short stories about the siege of Sarajevo written and published during the Bosnian war. She shows that although the book's title addresses a novice reader, the seemingly straightforward "relationship between narrator and reader, between literature and traumatic experience, is meaningfully complicated by the tone, the fragmentary nature, and the lived experience to which the work refers." Postema shows how "the textual features employed in *Sarajevo for Beginners* allow it to fit into a number of overlapping genres": the book for beginners, the field guide, and the survival guide. She argues that, while these genres are all "characterized by an eminently practical relationship between text and experience," in Kebo's *Sarajevo for Beginners* these textual practices function ironically. Her analysis reveals a double bind between traumatic experience and textual practice: "just as traumatic circumstance interacts with textual practice in the type of Bosnian witness literature to which

Sarajevo for Beginners belongs, so too are textual features implicated in conceptions of memory and commemorative practices." It is precisely in this gap between genre-specific reader expectations and textual execution, she claims, that "the book enacts its particular type of commemorative practice." *Sarajevo for Beginners*' enactment or performance of memory results from a "near temporal coincidence of witnessed event and its narration," and hence significantly complicates theories of (the literary representation of) trauma such as Cathy Caruth's, which foreground belatedness as the crucial temporal structure of trauma and focus on literary representations that by way of gaps and lacunae bring this aspect of trauma to the fore in a modernist key.

Whereas Postema looks at literature written during the Bosnian war, in the essay following hers, Vladimir Biti explores two novels dealing with the Bosnian war but composed in a linguistically, culturally, and geographically remote environment and at a temporal distance of more than fifteen years. Specifically, Biti examines the multiple entanglements of trauma and exile, homeland and "hostland," history and memory in the work of two Bosnian-born novelists: Saša Stanišić's *How the Soldier Repaired the Grammophone* and Ismet Prcic's *Shards*. Drawing on insights by Azade Seyhan and Ottmar Ette, Biti argues that exilic writing performs a double therapeutic and creative maneuver that "systematically links, deregulates and alters both the home and host territory, and parallel to that both the past and the present." On the one hand, exile literature works through "the trauma of domestic contestation and oppression," that is, "the refuge in the hostland enables it to rescue familiar memory archives" that are forgotten, ignored, contested, distorted, or erased by the politics of memory in the writer's former homeland. On the other hand, exile writers work through "the trauma of enforced assimilation"; they "challenge, dislocate and estrange the language and culture" of their hostlands by importing the language and culture of their homeland, a process which is particularly effective if the writer adopts the language of his host country, as is the case with both Stanišić, who writes in German, and Prcic, who choose English as his literary language. Taking his cue from the Lacanian concepts of *après-coup* and *déjà-vu*, Biti shows how both novels enact "a subversive mixing of diverse spatial and temporal registers as well as two distant languages". By doing so, Biti argues, both novels rewrite the teleological pattern of the Bildungsroman: instead of enlightened progression towards a mature, unified identity, Stanišić's and Prcic's narrators can only re-assemble fragments, or the shards of their traumatic past into a new "fractal" narrative and create "occasional and revocable homelands-on-the-move," thus turning literature into a loiterature.

Of course, working through historical traumas and losses is not limited to works of literature. As symbolic expressions of state power, monuments and me-

morial sites in particular have been placed at the center of memory studies, although their alleged permanence and monumentality have been challenged in recent decades by new approaches to commemoration, which stress the processual, dialogic, and transient nature of collective mourning (Young 1993; Sturken 1997). This approach is also visible in recent interventions by a new generation of visual and performance artists into the post-Yugoslav memorial landscapes, in which the heroic, internationalist, and monumental syntax of socialist memory has been replaced and rewritten by the new politics of national trauma and victimhood. Through the concept of "the unmemorable," the essay by Tomislav Pletenac and Sanja Potkonjak examines the way in which Sandra Vitaljić and Siniša Labrović, two artists belonging to the "post-memory generation," paradoxically represent and perform the "impossibility of mediating trauma, the failure of speech and image to represent a traumatic inheritance." These artists engage with "the afterlife" of antifascist memorials and Second World War's sites of trauma that have been obscured and rendered unintelligible during the re-memorialization process in post-socialist Croatia, thus dropping out of collective memory. Pletenac and Potkonjak first focus on Siniša Labrović's performance in the town of Sinj, *Bandaging the Wounded*, where Labrović mobilizes activist memory against collectively enforced historical amnesia, performing a public ritual of "healing" an antifascist memorial that has been first actively damaged during the Croatian War of Independence (1991–1995) and subsequently neglected by the local community. They then move on to Sandra Vitaljić's *Unfertile Grounds*, a photographic series of national landscapes marked by historical traumas. These photographs, Pletenac and Potkonjak argue, resist being read within the dominant political and symbolic codes of national memory and aim instead to produce an affective and individualized response in the viewer. In both cases, the artists powerfully foreground commemorative deficits and absences in Croatian collective memory, calling for empathetic reception rather than collective transference of historical trauma that only "produces new topographies of pain."

The participatory, open-ended and performative dimension of working through a difficult historical inheritance is also present in the next essay by Miranda Jakiša, which analyzes Oliver Frljić's play *Cowardice* as a controversial instance of contemporary post-Yugoslav vanguard theater. Pointing to the parallel emergence and mutual implication of the court of law and theater, a historical connection that also underlines the "theatrical" nature of the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia (ICTY), Jakiša explores how Frljić's participatory and site-specific play adjudicates, through artistic and "extralegal" means, the Serbian collective responsibility for the Srebrenica massacre while placing the theatrical form itself on trial. Drawing on Jacques Rancière's work, Jakiša sees *Cowardice* as a play that breaks the consensus of silence around

war crimes committed by the Serbian side in the war of the 1990s, thereby shifting "the boundary between those who have a place in the [social] order and those excluded from it." By ending the play with a recitation of names of Srebrenica victims, a gesture that reverses the order of the trial by reading the charge at the end, *Cowardice* transforms from participatory theater to "documenting investigative theater, which as a pure and simple 'bringing before the eyes,' is accorded a particular potential for yielding the truth" about war crimes and disrupting the reigning consensus of silence in Serbia.

The question of collective guilt, or rather the collective oblivion of the war crimes committed in the name of one's own nation, also resonates with post-Yugoslav prose writers in search of new aesthetic forms capable of rewriting exclusionary forms of memory and identity after the catastrophe of the 1990s. In the closing essay of this section, Stijn Vervaet looks at the intersection of memories of the Yugoslav wars and Holocaust memory in a Bosnian, Serbian, and Croatian novel: Irfan Horozović's *The Unknown Passerby in Berlin*, Saša Ilić's *The Berlin Window*, and Daša Drndić's *April in Berlin*. After a brief discussion of the ways in which since the 1980s onwards the memory of the Holocaust has been appropriated for political purposes in the former Yugoslavia, he explores how the novels, instead of making easy Holocaust analogies, make reference to Holocaust memory as a memory trigger, model, or unsuccessful template respectively. Drawing on Michael Rothberg's notion of *noeud de mémoire*, Vervaet demonstrates how each of the novels creates unexpected constellations of memory through different aesthetics, specific tropes, and intertextual and intermedial links. He shows that whereas Horozović's postmodernist novel, *The Unknown Passerby in Berlin*, proposes a politics of mourning and cosmopolitan openness to (the suffering of) the other through the figure of the doppelgänger, Ilić's and Drndić's novels focus on processes of collective remembering and forgetting. Ilić's *Berlin Window*, he demonstrates, can be read as a traumatic realist novel that points to the need for a more active working upon the past as the only possible remedy against a politics of self-victimization and collective amnesia in Serbia. Drndić's *April in Berlin*, however, deploys a neo avant-garde model and an aesthetics of shock to bring to the fore multiple webs of implication in post-war and contemporary (Central) Europe and Croatia. Vervaet argues that all three novels intervene into local, state-sponsored politics of memory, which tend to conceive of collective memory as inextricably linked to national identity, and foster instead forms of transnational solidarity.

Reclaiming the socialist past

To avoid reproducing the dangerous stereotype of Balkan history as exclusively violent and traumatic, the present volume also includes essays that recover the legacy of social struggle, utopian investments, and the cosmopolitan outlook specific to the more progressive cultural trends in the former Yugoslavia. The second cluster of essays explores those artistic and literary representations of Socialist Yugoslavia that aim to remedy the ideologically driven historical revisionism of the 1990s whose goal was to irreparably throw Yugoslavia into the "dustbin of history," labeling the fifty-year experience of peace, modernization, and relative prosperity as a "totalitarian prison house of nations." Indeed, the novels and essays of Dubravka Ugrešić and Marsela Šunjić, among others, have recorded the complexities and paradoxes, successes and failures of the Yugoslav experiment to the domestic and international reading public, often in a way that subverts nationalist or neoliberal accounts of the socialist past (see Demiragić). In addition to novels and film (see Jukić), protest against the erasure of socialist Yugoslavia's heritage from the public sphere is particularly visible in the field of visual and performance art, for example in the work of artistic-activist collectives such as Grupa Spomenik, Abart, Kontekst kolektiv, Prelom kolektiv, and The Ignorant Schoolmaster and his Committees (see Dedić). The members of many of these collectives have not had a direct experience of Yugoslavia, which means that the memory of the past has been additionally mediated by the previous generation and the experience of artistically and politically maturing in the so-called successor states. Such "post-memory" accounts (Hirsch 2012) are especially valuable because they show how new generations gain access to the past within the altered demands of the present, while at the same time they tell us what is specifically *new* in the post-Yugoslav experience. The essays in this section analyze how the artistic imagination shapes the cultural memory of Yugoslavia and makes it politically productive by critically reflecting on present conditions and triggering new discussions about the future of post-Yugoslav societies.

Pointing out the dominant trend of collective amnesia regarding the socialist past in post-Yugoslav societies, Ajla Demiragić explores how and to what extent literary representations of the socialist period can help not only to re-discover the socialist past but also to recuperate some positive aspects of the (forgotten) socialist experience. Assuming that the marginalized archive of women's writing might be a good starting point to look for counter-memory, she turned to novels by contemporary Bosnian women authors dealing with socialist Yugoslavia. She points out that, unfortunately, most novels to a large extent resemble and echo

dominant and revisionist narratives of Yugoslav socialism. In her discussion of novels and short stories by Jasmina Šamić, Nura Bazdulj Hubijar, and Cecilia Toskić, she demonstrates that these novels present the socialist period in a one-dimensional way, as a period characterized by the coercive nature and arbitrariness of government, as well as shortages and the violation of intellectual and artistic freedoms. Contrary to these mainstream novels, Demiragić shows that Marsela Šunjić's novel *Goodnight, City* can be read as an attempt to rescue the memory of Mostar as a Yugoslav city par excellence that was violently destroyed during the war and is now an ethnically divided city. The novel does this by using Mostar not merely as the setting or background of the novel but by zooming in on the life of Mostar's citizens as active actors and agents, as people with great and small hopes and political ideas, and pointing at the places in Mostar that continue to function as places of memory, acting as witnesses to the shared experience of a better past.

Balkan nationalisms forming on the ruins of socialist Yugoslavia have inspired numerous psychoanalytical readings, in the first place, Slavoj Žižek's Lacanian critiques of ideology, based on the notion of excessive enjoyment in the "National Thing," which "noxious" Others are trying to steal and contaminate (1993, 200 – 239). In particular, Žižek has used film not only to dissect those phantasmatic structures that underlie eruptive instances of national identification but also to recover popular cinema's subversive and revolutionary potential. Along similar lines Tatjana Jukić draws on Lacanian psychoanalysis to unearth the often-unexpected ways in which traces of Yugoslav socialism persist in the post-socialist imaginary in terms of symptoms and counter-archives in contemporary Croatian film. Starting from the claim that socialism in Yugoslavia, unlike most forms of central European socialism but very much like that found in the Soviet Union, had been constituted within the revolution rather than installed bureaucratically, Jukić first points out that in Yugoslavia socialism evolved with and into a *raison d'État* that "could not sustain the libidinal configurations and the assemblages of affect formative to the revolutionary communities." As an effect of this, she argues, the revolution kept "depleting its symbolic resources." Moreover, precisely to the extent to which the revolution "deregulated the symbolic economy of socialism," it "keeps regulating the rationale of postsocialism." From this position, she moves on to analyze Hrvoje Hribar's *What Is a Man Without a Moustache?*, a film paradigmatic of contemporary Croatian cinematic production. She shows how the film, despite its remoteness from the political history of Yugoslavia and its allegedly ethnographic character, is organized around a memory of the revolution and the assemblages – such as melancholia, masochism, and anti-Oedipal brotherhood – that are decisive for a revolutionary community.

In contrast to Jukić's contribution, where the revolutionary heritage is recovered unconsciously, through metonymical slips and veiled cinematic allusions, Nikola Dedić's essay looks at the various ways in which contemporary politicized artistic practices overtly and critically counter the erasure of Yugoslavia from public awareness in the post-Yugoslav nation-states. He identifies three ways of understanding art that serve as starting points from which artistic-activist collectives read and re-examine the legacy of socialist Yugoslavia. The first concept sees art as a form of archive, aimed at countering both the depoliticizing practices of Yugonostalgia and at (re)constructing "bodies of knowledge that might be relevant in the present social reality," as in the case of platforms such as *The Ignorant Schoolmaster and His Committees*, *Media Archaeology*, and the *Abart* collective in Mostar. The second conceptualization of art considers art as a way to create a counter-public sphere and include the activity of marginalized groups, for example by "re-actualizing the Yugoslav project's class and emancipatory potentials," as in the case of *The Break Collective*, *The Monument Group*, and *The Four Faces of Omarska*, which all aim to disrupt the neoliberal and nationalist consensus. The third model starts from an understanding of art as a class-motivated and ideological critique of the neoliberal concept of transition: artistic collectives such as *The Four Faces of Omarska*, *The Context Collective*, and artist Dubravka Sekulić interrogate the link between the commercialization and commodification of culture and the depoliticization of cultural production, as well as between the logic of the liberal market and the privatization of public space. Dedić concludes on an Adornian note that it is precisely post-Yugoslav art's antagonistic relationship with society that forms the basis of its emancipatory potential.

Reconfiguring the post-Yugoslav present

The essays in the final section address more explicitly the role of various media of memory in post-Yugoslav culture and the ways in which intermediality and the re-mediation of memory help engender new forms of visibility, plurality, and solidarity in emergent civil societies. This section is the most diverse in terms of various media and cross-media interaction, with essays covering media ranging from postmodern novels, portraiture (in painting, sculpture, and photography) and comics, to public poetry readings and discussions open to the public, and social media such as Youtube and Facebook. What these memorial practices have in common is that they open up new spaces of memorial entanglement beyond state control. They do so by either reconstructing and recuperating transnational Yugoslav cultural genealogies (see Snel, Zorić) that transcend national

canons (Snel) or institutionalizing forms of cultural memory (see Zorić, Beronja) or opening up vistas toward new forms of commonality that move beyond established ethno-national communities (see Beronja, Arsenijević, Pogačar). By creatively re-assembling the Yugoslav past, all these cultural practices in one way or another re-claim a part of the public sphere and subvert the ethnonational and or neo-liberal logic of the transitional present.

In the opening essay of this section, Guido Snel takes Dubravka Ugrešić's exile novel, *The Museum of Unconditional Surrender* (1998), as both a starting point and a dominant framework for tracing a Yugoslav artistic and literary genealogy that stretches from Ivo Andrić, Miroslav Krleža, Danilo Kiš, and Leonid Šejka all the way to Miloš Bobić, Daša Drndić, and Ugrešić herself, thereby establishing a line of continuity around the use of mnemonic tropes intended to counter forgetting in the wake of wars and other historical ruptures. In particular, Snel focuses on those tropes that oscillate between order and chaos, form and formlessness, totality and fragmentation, such as catalogues, photo albums, encyclopedic lists, and garbage heaps, connecting these to the experience of exile and literary homelessness, namely, to "those who are excluded by their national communities" and "otherwise condemned to oblivion." Ugrešić's *Museum of Unconditional Surrender* is paradigmatic in this respect; but it is also exceptional owing largely to the historical moment in which it was written. On the one hand, the novel assimilates a spectacular overabundance of modernist literary tropes into its heterogeneous structure in an effort to construct a total memory "in competition with God." On the other hand, it fails to keep up with the impulse of history to scatter existing totalities and continually produce new disasters, which, as Snel argues, yields melancholia. The essay concludes by reflecting on the differences between memory in literature and on the web, contending that even in our digital age serious literature can still communicate historical experience and forge intellectual and affective solidarities in ways that challenge reigning clichés and political dogmas.

In the essay following, Vladimir Zorić makes a similar move to Snel, arguing that "the rethinking of the Yugoslav past as an emancipative rather than traumatic locus will not be driven by the generational remembrance of the halcyon days of social equality and national parity. Rather, the process will hinge upon the possibility of constructing a sufficient number of cohesive figures of moral authority and supranational relevance." Apart from Danilo Kiš, Zorić contends, such a supranational icon relevant to intellectuals in the whole region of the former Yugoslavia would be the Serbian philosopher, critic, and writer Radomir Konstantinović. However, because of his radical criticism of the provincial worldview (expressed most notably in his *The Philosophy of the Small Town*), which is incompatible with the conservative nation-state model that has prevailed in Ser-

bia, and because of the country's unresolved debates about the past and unstable state institutions, Konstantinović has not (yet) obtained a place in the Serbian cultural canon. Zorić focuses specifically on portraiture (painting, photography, and sculpture) as a cross-media genre and medium of memory that complements the textual aspect of Konstantinović's commemoration. The memory of the recently deceased Konstantinović, Zorić shows, is subject to a tension between group-based generational memory (the memory upheld by a close circle of friends and family members) and a canonical cultural memory in the making. Portraiture, Zorić argues, plays the vital role of negotiating between these two forms of memory, between living memory and cultural artifact. Importantly, Zorić's essay for the first time brings together a selection of various portraits of Konstantinović, which creates a public archive on its own.

Indeed, in recent decades, visual and mixed media forms are arguably replacing strictly textual channels of cultural memory, re-mediating and rearranging texts of the past without sacrificing complexity and critical vigor. In this vein, Ann Rigney has suggested that our image of the past is no longer formed by popular historical novels, such as Walter Scott's Waverly Novels, but "by graphic novels like Art Spiegelman's *Maus* (1973, 1986) or Joe Sacco's *Safe Area Goražde* (2000) and by virtual memorials using the new digital media" (2008, 345). Drawing on complimenting insights by comic book scholars and theorists of cultural memory, Vlad Beronja reads two albums by Aleksandar Zograf, one of the most accomplished comic book creators in Serbia, as an ongoing project to archive and re-mediate the forgotten and marginalized artifacts of mass culture related specifically to Balkan modernity. Through Zograf's practice of flea market archaeology, Beronja argues, forgotten and non-canonical artifacts of mass culture are once again brought into cultural circulation where they acquire new values, meanings, and frames of interpretation, frequently forming surreal historical rhymes with the present epoch. Beronja opposes Zograf's inclusive albeit transient archive of everyday life, placed "into visual boxes and narrative dioramas," to the epic and monumental history paradigmatic of Balkan political memory. Focusing on Zograf's representation of Balkan towns, which take the from of "ghostly palimpsests," on the one hand, and his re-mediation of lowbrow science fiction novels on the other, which recapture the elapsed utopian images for the post-utopian present, Beronja shows how these comics can accommodate a fragile and self-reflective politics of hope while marking a difference between the past and any new present as a potential moment of progressive transformation.

The transformative potential of art to intervene into the public sphere and create new forms of commonality and supranational solidarity is also at the heart of the next essay. In their contribution, Damir Arsenijević, Jasmina Husa-

nović, and Sari Wastell examine the emergent memorial and artistic practices in the context of a new future-oriented paradigm of transitional justice in post-Dayton Bosnia, where the present serves as "a moment of linkage, of transition" demanding "that all members of a society engage with the traumatic memory, not simply the political elite who benefitted from the war." Traversing multiple disciplinary boundaries, such as law, politics, and forensic science, the authors argue that these politicized memorial practices involved in the management of post-conflict societies work to construct "a shared and share-able public language of grief [...], a particular sort of affect that engages with the losses and remnants of the catastrophe besetting forms of sociality and politicality in Bosnia and Herzegovina and its regional, as well as global contexts." In their first case study, they discuss public poetry readings by contemporary Bosnian poets organized by the artistic platform *Mathemes of Re-Association*. Conceived as "distributive monuments," these performances and discussions inevitably generated "open scripts" in which individual affects and political positions were assembled and re-assembled into free associations guaranteeing no definite outcome. Their second case study concerns another project by *Mathemes of Re-Association*, which in the form of public forums (held in Belgrade, Banja Luka, and Zagreb) interrogates the ethnonationalist foreclosure of identity and memory in the process of identifying the nameless victims buried in mass graves. By insisting on "the uncomfortable surplus" in the bodily remains that cannot be identified by modern science, the *Mathemes of Re-Association* platform "opens up the space of politics, of a specific type of subjectivization that is not based on identity or counting." These open-ended and politicized memorial languages, the authors argue, can serve as a basis for "a new politics of hope beyond both ethnic and multicultural discourses of nation and religion, law and science."

The locus of grassroots agonistic politics has been increasingly shifting from the agora to the virtual space, where new imaginary communities are being formed on a daily basis, which by their very virtuality transcend the territorial and administrative boundaries of the nation-state. Given the substantial role that the constructions of the common past play in legitimizing political agendas, it is hardly surprising that the web has also become a major forum for negotiating popular history and making new collective memories, often in opposition to the structurally similar discourses of the existing states. In the closing essay of the selection, Martin Pogačar looks at the afterlife of Yugoslavia on the Internet and social media. Drawing on the concepts of media archaeology and micro-archiving, Pogačar explores how the (co-)creation of individual, affective, and grassroots digital memorials dedicated to the deceased country and individual pop culture icons serve not only as a "cyberspace of memory" for the individual author(s) but also as "a space of memorial entanglement for and with other

users." In the context of the former Yugoslavia, in which dead bodies over the past decades have gained political currency (see Verdery 1999) and in which the rise of digital technologies occurred more or less at the same time as the collapse of the country, the digital resurfacing of the country and its pop culture icons, Pogačar contends, appears as a significant (and at times even amusing) way of dealing with the phenomenon of death and transience. Performing a multimodal discourse analysis of a sample of digital memorials on Facebook and YouTube, Pogačar demonstrates that the "deceased" country and its pop culture personae are used not only as affective intermediaries to renegotiate the Yugoslav socialist past and contest narrowing and nationalizing historical narratives but also as vehicles to make sense of an ambiguous present and to articulate an affective claim to the validity of individual, intimate memories.

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Part 1: **Entangled Legacies of Extreme Violence: Traumatic Memories in the Aftermath of the Yugoslav Successor Wars**

Antje Postema

"Read and Remember": Ozren Kebo's *Sarajevo for Beginners* as Ironic Guidebook and Narrative Memorial

Introduction

This essay examines Ozren Kebo's *Sarajevo for Beginners* [*Sarajevo za početnike*], a collection of short prose written and published during the war in Bosnia. Kebo's text fits with other works of Bosnian literature that serve as witnesses to the trauma of Sarajevo's three-and-a-half-year besiegement; it also shares features with contemporary acts of memorialization, and in particular the literary memorialization, that took place both during and following the war. Kebo's title highlights the work's particular take on the relationship between narrative documentation and memorialization. It overtly addresses the novice reader as a "beginner" or "dummy" in need of a guide to the city during its wartime perils. However, the seeming straightforwardness of the project's paratextual framing – its relationship between narrator and reader, and between literature and traumatic experience – is meaningfully complicated by the tone, the fragmentary nature, and the lived experience to which the work refers. In the following pages, I demonstrate, first of all, that the textual features employed in *Sarajevo for Beginners* allow it to fit into a number of overlapping genres: in addition to being a book for beginners, it can also be read as a field and survival guide. These heavily stylized genres are all characterized by an eminently practical relationship between text and experience; moreover, they are fundamentally fragmentary rather than exhaustive. While delineating the varied generic contours of the work, I argue that the kinds of textual practice that Kebo employs in *Sarajevo for Beginners* function ironically; they allow the narrative to address critically the experiential traumas the prose incorporates and to reflexively evaluate the dialectical relationship between textual structures and the acts of memorialization in which they participate.

Kebo is a Bosnian journalist and author who spent most of his adult life living and working in Sarajevo.[1] As a journalist and editor, he has been heavily in-

1 *Sarajevo for Beginners*'s characteristically ironic biographical note reads: "And now a little about the author, his person, background, and character, related to different cities: Ozren Kebo, 1959, no criminal record; sign: Gemini, Ascendant sign: unspecified. Born in Mostar, fell in love

volved in Sarajevo's dynamic and celebrated cultural scene that defined the urban landscape and made the city rightfully famous from the early 1980s onward.[2] During the war, this cultural activity was marshaled for anti-war movements and channeled into a huge number and variety of "cultural resistance" projects.[3] The proximal impetus behind and constant referential focus of Kebo's collection is the traumatic experience of the war, which he personally witnessed. *Sarajevo for Beginners* belongs among the numerous contemporary artistic projects that both protested the bitter violence raging in Bosnia and viewed artistic media as crucial to both intellectual engagement with the circumstances of war and as a way to preserve highly valued aspects of prewar life in Sarajevo.[4] These works of wartime Bosnian literary witness are, by and large, marked by a sense of immediacy towards unfolding events. They are frequently gritty, sometimes crude. They were published amid wartime shortages and distributed with great difficulty and often with authorial sacrifice. They are politically and ethically engaged. Many are difficult to fit into strict genres and often push at the boundary separating fiction from non-fiction. They are intertextually rich and employ a wide variety of media (often within a single work). They are compact and their elements are often short and fragmentary.[5]

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in Dubrovnik, spent the largest part of his life in Sarajevo. It seems that there is a hidden curse in his path: whatever city his steps took him to was later destroyed" (Kebo 2000, 215). Translations from Bosnian/Croatian/Serbian are my own.

2 For more on the lively and unique Sarajevo artistic and cultural milieu, see Levi (2007) and Markowitz (2010).

3 In his analysis of "engaged" literature in wartime Bosnia, Enver Kazaz links such literature and criticism to a specific, largely anti-nationalist type of political outlook and critical stance. For this reason, Kazaz (2004) claims that the semantic basis for so-called war literature is anti-war even if its theme or setting is war.

4 These projects include but are obviously not limited to: the Sarajevo Film Festival, FAMA's Survival Art Museums (1992, 1994, and 1996) and *Sarajevo Survival Guide*, Alma Suljević's "Kentaur" tram installation, Radio Zid's programming, TRIO's postcard-sized pop-art posters, the "Miss Sarajevo" beauty pageant, and the approximately ninety literary and scholarly texts published during the war years.

5 For example, I have in mind the following works: Zlatko Dizdarević's columns in *Oslobođenje* [*Liberation*], Nedžad Ibrišimović's *Knjiga Adema Kahrimana napisana Nedžadom Ibrišimovićem Bosancem* [*The Book of Adem Kahriman, Written by Nedžad Ibrišimović the Bosnian*], Miljenko Jergović's *Sarajevski Marlboro* [*Sarajevo Marlboro*], Dževad Karahasan's *Dnevnik selidbe* [*Diary of Exodus*], Alma Lazarevska's *Sarajevski pasijans* [*Sarajevo Solitaire*] and *Smrt u muzeju moderne umjetnosti* [*Death in the Museum of Modern Art*], Semezdin Mehmedinović's *Sarajevo Blues*, Abdulah Sidran's *Sarajevski tabut* [*Sarajevo Coffin*], Nenad Veličković's *Đavo u Sarajevu* [*The Devil in Sarajevo*] and *Konačari* [*Lodgers*], Marko Vešović's *Smrt je majstor iz Srbije* [*Death is a Handyman from Serbia*], and Karim Zaimović's *Tajna džema od malina* [*The Secret of Raspberry Jam*].