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(Post)-Yugoslav Memory Travels: National and Transnational Dimensions

1 The breakup of Yugoslavia and post-Yugoslav memory regimes

The disintegration of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRY) and the ensuing wars have been life-changing events for those who remained in the region and those who departed to make new lives in Europe and beyond. The reasons for Yugoslavia's violent collapse and the nature of postsocialist transformations have been a common point of discussion in numerous historical and theoretical attempts to reconsider the broader history of Yugoslavia (Glenny 1996; Djokić 2003; Ramet 2005; Bieber et al. 2014). Despite the larger context of the Fall of the Berlin Wall and changes in the global geopolitical landscape, the dismembering of the Yugoslav state and especially the brutality that accompanied it, came as a great surprise. Events such as the three-year siege of Sarajevo and the genocide against Muslims in Srebrenica in July 1995 brought violence that had been considered unthinkable after World War II to Europe. Several decades later, the catastrophic fate and difficult experiences of post-Yugoslav states, continue to provide material for academic and public controversies. The break-up, the war and the region's ethnic nationalisms remain evergreen topics for public, cultural and political discourses in both the formerly warring territories and the rest of Europe.

The term "Yugoslavia" has long been used to signify various concepts, ideas, political entities and ideologies. Throughout the twentieth century, Yugoslavia's territory was the site of repeated attempts to implement political projects of identity and nationhood. As Tanja Petrović notes (2012), "Yugoslavia" and "the SFRY" are usually used as synonyms (unless explicitly marked by other adjectives) in the local public discourses in the region. The two notions, however, are not the same. Typically, "Yugoslavia" is intertwined with the ideology of "Yugoslavism" – or the Yugoslav idea – which was a key discursive and imaginative element in the constitution of both the pre- and post-World War II Yugoslav states. While ideological premises fluctuated, the central idea of uniting southern Slavs in a multi-ethnic, supra-national state remained. In its first iteration, the Yugoslav Kingdom's goal (1918–1941) was the creation of a unitary Yugoslav nation (Wachtel 1998; Djokić 2003). In its second incarnation, the Federal People's Republic of Yugoslavia, later on SFRY, founded in 1945 under the leadership of Josip Broz-Tito, the idea of building the Yugoslav nation was transformed into

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the ideology of "brotherhood and unity" among the main ethno-national groups residing in the six republics and two autonomous provinces.

While the socialist regime promulgated a collective memory of the conjoined Yugoslav nations' heroic martyrdom during World War II, in the post-Yugoslav period, nationalists in each of the former Yugoslav republics replaced this collective narrative with their own histories of national group suffering under the socialist regime. Reinterpretation of the socialist past was a key strategy to establish and legitimise ethno-national ideologies in the aftermath of Yugoslavia's collapse. At the same time, however, nostalgic discourses and narratives of the socialist past have emerged and became increasingly popular. The post-Yugoslav public sphere, then, has become the site of binary and conflicting memory regimes: on the one hand, ethnically-exclusive memories used to annihilate all things "Yugoslav"; on the other hand, *Yugonostalgia* is a wide range of counter-memory narratives and practices, commonly perceived as an idealisation of former community and ideology (Volčič 2007; Luthar and Pušnik 2010; Galijaš 2015).

Understood foremost as a transitional cultural phenomenon, nostalgia for socialism, including German *Ostalgie*, Soviet nostalgia and Yugonostalgia has attracted considerable scholarly attention in the last two decades (Boym 2001; Scribner 2003; Brunnbauer 2007; Todorova and Gille 2010). These various manifestations of nostalgia refer to forms of affectionate and popular memories about the former socialist regimes in the Eastern block or various features belonging to the everyday life of the period (Scribner 2003; Todorova and Gille 2010). The term *Yugonostalgia* itself has in a relatively short time passed through several semantic phases. It was coined in the 1990s by Croatian media that used it to attack people who criticised the hegemonic ethno-nationalist discourse and was a synonym to "a suspect person", "a public enemy", or "a person who regrets the collapse of Yugoslavia" (Ugrešić 1998). As Dubravka Ugrešić, the Croatian writer and one of the most vocal critics of the post-Yugoslav nationalisms, notes in one of her earlier essays:

> *Yugo-nostalgia* is one of the most loaded of political qualifications in a paranoid communicative situation, more loaded than many other labels in use today; such as *Chetnik, nationally colourblind, commie, Serb chauvinist*, and the like. [. . .] most of all, nostalgia is dangerous because it encourages . . . remembering. And in the newly established reality everything starts again from scratch. And in order to start from scratch, everything that came before must be forgotten. (Ugrešić 1998, 88–89, emphasis in original)

Gradually, however, artists, writers, film directors, cultural activists and entrepreneurs across post-Yugoslav nation-states have appropriated the term as they have produced alternative representations and interpretations of the Yugoslav past, grounding these visions in the mundane, everyday experiences of this period. Since the end of the 1990s, post-Yugoslav states have seen what Volčič described as "the reinvention and rebranding of nostalgic cultural products including Yugo-films and Yugoslav music" (2007, 25). Such representations have found expression across genres and environments, appearing in, for example, museum exhibitions, theatrical and literary works, films, popular music and internet culture (Perković 2011; Velikonja 2009, 2012; Bošković 2013; Pogačar 2016).

In the post-Yugoslav cinema, Yugonostalgic elements and tonalities were present as early as the 1990s. In their early manifestation, they related chiefly to Yugoslavia's former president Josip Broz-Tito.[1] Later, a number of films, TV shows and documentaries showcased various facets of everyday and popular culture of the Yugoslav period, offering personal accounts from the perspective of different generations (see Milivojevic, this volume). In most of these productions, nostalgia is combined with irony, humour or criticism of the past regime and its official ideology, offering a bittersweet re-construction of personal memory narratives (Daković 2008, 2014). In popular music, Yugonostalgia finds its expression foremost in the revival of the Yu-rock (Stankovič 2001; Volčič 2007; Spaskovska 2011). Yugoslav rock bands of the 1970s–80s, like *White Button* (*Bijelo Dugme*), *Electric Orgasm* (*Elektricni orgazam*) and *Azra,* were popular at home and abroad, making Yu-rock one of the socialist era's most significant cultural exports. In the post-Yugoslav period, Yu-rock experienced growing popularity and revival, becoming a way to reclaim a shared Yugoslav legacy (Stankovič 2001; Volčič 2007; Velikonja 2014). The two genres of movie and music reinforced each other in artistic articulations of Yugonostalgia. While Yu-rock songs were widely used in soundtracks for post-Yugoslav films, the Yu-rock bands became subject for numerous documentary movies and TV shows.

In the following chapters on post-Yugoslav cinema and reception of Yu-rock among diaspora youth in Switzerland, we demonstrate that Yugonostalgia is not a mere romanticisation of the socialist regime, but that there are a variety of nostalgic motives, narratives and thematic tropes related to everyday life and popular culture of the Yugoslav period. In its various cultural, artistic and individual articulations, Yugonostalgia is a transnational and transgenerational phenomenon widespread across the former Yugoslav region and the ex-Yugoslav diaspora (Petrović 2012; Velikonja 2008, 2009, 2012).

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1 In this regard, these films can be related to as "Titostalgia", Velikonja's (2008) neologism, which represents another widely spread sub-category of Yugonostalgia and refers exclusively to the cult of Josip Broz Tito. It includes a broad range of products, media and narratives.

2 Memories of Yugoslavia in the diaspora

In recent years, scholars have paid close attention to the practices of remembering among transnational migrant communities (e.g. Erll 2011; Rigney and Cesari 2014; Rothberg 2014; Palmberger and Tošić 2016). Out-migration from the former Yugoslavia to the rest of the world has a lengthy history (Brunnbauer 2009). During and after World War II, it was mainly politically-motivated emigration of groups who opposed the socialist regime (Ragazzi 2009). In the 1960s–80s there was a boom of economically-driven labour migration to the countries of Western Europe. The only socialist country that officially allowed out-migration for economic purposes to the "capitalist West", the Yugoslav government encouraged this labour migration in order to tackle its own economic problems (Brunnbauer 2019). With the violent breakup of Yugoslavia, and the ensuing wars in Croatia (1991–1995), Bosnia (1992–1995) and in Kosovo (1998–1999), it was mainly war-related, refugee migration that dominated migration waves. These consequently resulted in the creation of large diaspora communities in European countries such as Germany, Sweden, Austria or Switzerland (Dahinden 2009; Valenta and Ramet 2011; Halilovich 2013).

The scholarly discussion of memories related to Yugoslavia among diaspora communities are scarce. Yet, it is clear that ways of remembering Yugoslav past are as diverse as the ex-Yugoslav diaspora itself. Here generational differences, circumstances and historical contexts of migration, families' socio-economic backgrounds (both in the country of origin and in the country of residence) and other factors play a role. For instance, the urban-rural gap characteristic for socialist Yugoslavia, often linked to different attitudes to religion and national identity, finds reflection in diverging memories of life under socialism. Some families' memories reflect experiences of religious and/or ethnic discrimination that diverge from the dominant Yugoslav narrative of "brotherhood and unity" (Eastmond 2016; Halilovich 2013; Palmberger 2008; van Gorp and Smets 2015). For refugee families, these were the experiences of violence and displacement that left the strongest imprint on an individual's relationship to the past (Eastmond 2016; Üllen 2017). Thus, traumatic experiences were often relegated to the realm of suppressed and silenced memories (Kidron 2009). Nevertheless, scholars such as van Gorp and Smets persuasively argue that nostalgia across the Yugoslav diaspora expresses longing for a lost home and familial environment – "a place that no longer exists" – rather than for the former political regime (2015, 81). They note that cultural artefacts like Yugoslav music, films and literature trigger memories and emotions related to a home and a past which is lost (van Gorp and Smets 2015).

The Yugoslav disintegration wars have divided diaspora communities along ethno-religious lines. In Switzerland, as in other countries of Western Europe, before the break-up migrants from Yugoslavia were collectively referred to as "Yugoslavs". Migrant workers were not particularly attentive to ethnic or religious differences themselves and socialised in joint migrant clubs officially linked to the Yugoslav state (Dahinden 2009; Behloul 2016). After the break-up, however, the "Yugoslav diaspora" was divided into ethnically homogenous migrant communities. Serbs and Croats, for instance, joined their respective ethno-religious organisations (diaspora churches), while Albanian Muslims and Bosnian Muslims organised themselves in Islamic cultural associations (Behloul 2016). These established migrant associations that claim to represent migrant communities as a whole often replicate ethno-national ideologies and narratives from the respective post-Yugoslav states (Behloul 2016; Dahinden 2009). In this context, memories of Yugoslavia were relegated into the private realm and are shared within family or closed private circles. Rarely, if ever, are there references to the Yugoslav past during community events and celebrations among particular diasporic groups.[2]

Nevertheless, the phenomenon of Yugonostalgia does exist in the diaspora, mostly beyond the realms of organised migrant associations.[3] It finds its articulation among youth of migrant background who never lived in socialist Yugoslavia itself or who have only fragmented memories of this time (Müller-Suleymanova 2020; Rossig 2008).

The analysis of the second-generation youths'[4] Yugonostalgia in the following chapter reveals how perception of the Yugoslav past by diaspora youth is based not only – and not even principally – on familial memories. Instead, it is driven by cultural production from the period, such as music. Yu-rock – the popular rock of the 1970s and 80s – has become a powerful point of attraction for particular segments of diasporic youth of ex-Yugoslav background who see themselves outside of ethno-nationally segregated migrant communities. These young descendants of immigrants seek to socialise in ethnically mixed groups and celebrate a shared cultural legacy of Yugoslavia (Müller-Suleymanova, this volume). In Switzerland, the Yu-rock scene consists of an informal network of

2 Often, the memories of Yugoslavia are invoked in the form of popular music from this period. One of the authors have observed how music hits from the Yugoslav times have been played on several event of Swiss-Bosnian (Muslim) diaspora organisations.

3 Van Gorp and Smets (2015) point to the existence of internet sites where transnational diaspora participate in the celebration of the Yugoslav legacy.

4 The terms "second generation" and "youth of migrant background" are used interchangeably to refer to young people who were born or were raised in the countries of their parents' or grandparents' immigration (Levitt 2009).

people who organise their own parties and gigs at various venues and invite Yu-rock stars to perform. As one of the initiators of the Yu-rock parties put it:

> There were many Yugonostalgics in this bar . . . because, you know, my pub was like a little Yugoslavia, right? Somehow, no one would ask you there who you are in terms of ethnicity . . . and the language, you know, it was called Serbo-Croatian in Yugoslavia, and then afterwards it was Serbian, Croatian or Bosnian. And we said at some point, we just call it 'our language' ('naš jezik').

While members of this scene in Switzerland celebrate the cultural legacy of Yugoslavia and its shared past, they express a range of attitudes towards Yugoslavia as a political project. Some are nostalgic towards the entire idea of Yugoslavia, including its political ideas. Others are critical of its oppressive regime, especially towards national or religious identities. This variety of sentiments towards the Yugoslav project, however, does not preclude these young people to come together and celebrate its cultural legacy. The Yu-rock scene itself might be small or even marginal, but it has given rise to a remarkable space of alternative memories and receptions of the Yugoslav idea that fosters transethnic solidarity and new notions of belonging among (post-)migrant generation.

3 Popular culture, generations and nostalgia

In the following chapters, our exploration of two different cultural and social realms – film production and life-worlds of diaspora youth – highlights how the Yugoslav cultural legacy remains a powerful locus of attraction for post-Yugoslav generations, both at home and abroad. This should not come as a surprise, since popular culture – cinema, television and popular music – was widely used across socialist regimes to transmit the messages and discourses of official ideology to various audiences (Kolanović 2011; Perica and Velikonja 2012). At the same time, this popular culture was also subversive towards official ideology containing codes of resistance and non-conformism (Ramet 2019; Stankovič 2001). It contained multiple and ambivalent meanings and it could be read by the subsequent generations in myriads of ways. Yugoslav popular culture was therefore not only part of the state's utopian myth, but also a component of the Yugoslav past that outlasted the official state.

As Yugonostalgia has spread through various media, forms and contexts, it has become one of the key codes of cultural and political communication in post-Yugoslav societies at home and abroad (Velikonja 2009, 384). As Mihelj highlighted, publicly circulated memories embedded in genres such as films, popular songs, television or mass-mediated photographs have become "part of our personal relationship with the past" (2017, 244). This diversity of forms and contexts points to the "heteroglossing" or "polysemic" nature of nostalgia, which can have multiple articulations and meanings in specific contexts and situations (Nadkarni and Shevchenko 2004; Boyer 2010). As Mihelj rightfully pointed out, we should not interpret nostalgia as an "exclusive property" of post-socialist societies but "as a symptom of shared modes of engagement with the past characteristic of modern societies globally" (2017, 247).

Various scholars have argued that nostalgia is a de-politicised form of memory that relies primarily on consumerist products and the commodification of the past (Volčič 2007, Luthar and Pušnik 2010; Jansen 2005). Driven by increasing commercial consumption and competition, the recycling of old media content – in forms such as "retromania" – is widespread in contemporary pop-cultural production and practice (Reynolds 2011; Mihelj 2017). In our readings, however, we draw on conceptualisations of nostalgia that acknowledge the political and emancipatory potentials of Yugonostalgia (Velikonja 2009; Petrović 2012). In the following chapters, Yugonostalgia evokes an image of Yugoslavia as a space of limited but extant cultural freedom that is used to articulate a critique of present-day political and cultural realities. It opens up the tropes for young people to formulate alternative visions of the past that are simultaneously oriented towards the present and the future (Boym 2001; Palmberger 2008; Velikonja 2009; Petrović 2012).

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