ARTISTIC PRACTICE-BASED/AUTOETHNOGRAPHIC EXPLORATION INTO THE ISSUES OF BELONGINGS, IDENTITY, LOSS, AND TRAUMA THROUGH PHOTOGRAPHY: THE YUGOSLAV CASE

IVANA MANCIC

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of Nottingham Trent University for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

June 2024

"The copyright in this work is held by the author. You may copy up to 5% of this work for private study, or personal, non-commercial research. Any reuse of the information contained within this document should be fully referenced, quoting the author, title, university, degree level and pagination. Queries or requests for any other use, or if a more substantial copy is required, should be directed to the author."

To All the Ghosts Out There, to my Family Members

Abstract:

This PhD thesis addresses the issues surrounding the Yugoslav Civil war by offering my personal narrative in relation to loss and disappearance resulting from the exposure to war and sanctions in the nineties and the "Merciful Angel" bombing operation of Serbia by NATO in 1999. It thus focuses on the female interpretation of people, ways of life, buildings and human artefacts belonging to the historical period of communist Yugoslavia which once were, yet no longer remain. The research tackles different issues concerning life during Yugoslavia and the subsequent reestablishment of patriarchal values which occurred at the start of Yugoslav Civil war and conflicts that marked it. Photographic practice-based research allows an insight into individual stories which form a deeper understanding of the pre- and post- war Yugoslav society and the political circumstances surrounding it. The usage of photography as a vehicle for meaning making, allows an insight into the lives of people during communism through the lens of my closest family members. The work with archives, especially the photographs which originate from my personal family possession, brings closer these ghosts of the past times to the present moment. Microscope photography, as an element of practice-based research, offers a unique contribution by conveying my emotional response to what Yugoslavia represents in my experience. Furthermore, photography as a visual narrative is a means to investigate the society during and after the period of Yugoslavia. Autoethnography and site writing, as research methods combined with personal narrative, are also employed to allow a deeper understanding of culture and values of Yugoslav society and their subsequent clash. In addition, this research celebrates the importance of female voice and activism in the constant battle against patriarchy by acknowledging responsibility and patriarchal nature of war.

Acknowledgements:

I would like to thank all the people who supported me during this research and all those who helped showcase my artwork and art practice. First of all, a big thank you to my Director of Studies, Duncan Higgins who offered amazing support during the overall research process and showed high levels of patience and understanding. I am very grateful to the convenors of the Early Career Researcher award, Dr Iryna Kuksa and Dr Theodore Hughes-Riley for supporting me through the ECR award. I would also like to thank all the artists who dedicated their time during the interviews and shared their art practices, organisers of Feminist Colony in Sicevo, Serbia who provided me with an opportunity to participate in the residencies organized by the Center for Girls, Nis, Serbia. I want to extend my gratitude to my supervisors Dr Kevin Hunt and Dr Katja Hock, my friends Dr Adrian Shaw and Agnes Williams, my PhD colleague Patricia Francis for her commitment during the filming of Art of the Oppressed, which showcased my art practice along other two chosen female artists, Jane Bonnell who helped with data management, Danica Maier and Emma Cocker for organizing DREAM seminars which were very helpful in terms of practice based research and methodology, Julie Ann Lane and NonPlace Collective for helping me organise a webinar during the Fringe Arts Bath, organizers of Loss Festivals, who allowed me to present my art practice in as a part of the event Yugoslavia Memory, Ruma County Museum for allowing me to use their archival photographic material and the wonderful people from Blunk gallery in Trondheim, Norway. In addition, I want to thank the people who helped me publish my work: Amalija Stojsavljevic and Verein Kunstentropie, Vienna for my publishing my article Art Therapy. Trauma and Ways of Dealing With it, in a book Uterus Effect, organizers of Xenofeminism and Other Forms of Realist and Materialist Feminism: A Vantage Point of a Radically Novel Politics conference in Skopje, North Macedonia, for publishing my article Outside of Memories We Belong, Women of Yugoslavia in the Journal Identities. Above all, this research would not be possible without my family, Mirjana Kvaic, my mum, Darko Vujacic, Bigheami Inetimi, my husband and Ena Mancic, my daughter.

The following publications have arisen from my PhD studies:

List the publications:

Publication *Outside of Memories We Belong, Women of Yugoslavia*, in *Identities: Journal for Politics, Gender, and Culture*, Institute of Social Sciences and Humanities – Skopje, 2020, North Macedonia https://identitiesjournal.edu.mk/index.php/IJPGC/issue/view/25?fbclid=IwAR0G *O5LzIzPttBnGoHNFYLmmnLC-52xeDUfKhFPmDvqvsIV-*

akJ4qSeM0s

Publication *Art Therapy: Trauma and Ways of Dealing with it*, in *Uterus Effect*, supported by the Cultural Department of the City of Vienna (MA7) and the Association Kunstentropie, Vienna, Austria. http://kunstentropie.com/

2020. The Order of Labour with Silver Wreath and the Plaquette of Yugoslav Trade Union of Industry and Mining Workers, Journal of the Society of Medals and Orders Research, England.

Table Of Contents:

Abstract	i
Acknowledgments	
Table of Contents	iii
List Of Photographs	vi i
1. Introduction	1
1.1 Personal Narrative	1
1.2 Practice	2
1.3 Autoethnography	2
1.4 Site-Writing	3
1.5 Trauma	3
2. Key Issues Explored	4
2.1 Identity, Loss and Belonging	4
2.2 Famala Vaina	r

2.3 Historic 'Truth' And Subjective Experience	15
2.3.1 Stadium and Punctum in Relationship to Objective Historic 'Truth' and Subjective Experience	16
2.4 Trauma	17
2.4.1 Memory and Trauma	18
3 Research Context	23
3.1 Origins of Research	23
3.2 Art as A Response to War-Literature Review of Artists and Art Works	24
3.3 Photographic Theory and History	32
4. Methodology	37
4.1 Photographic Practice-Based Research	37
4.2 Storytelling and History	39
4.3 Autoethnography	41
4.3.1 Autoethnography and Culture	4 1

4.3.2 Further Criticism and Advantages of Autoethnography	44
4.3.3 Autoethnography and Vulnerability	46
4.3.4 Validating Autoethnography	47
4.3.5 Art and Autoethnography	49
4.4 Site Writing Methodology	51
5. Discussion Chapter	53
5.1 Methods Used: Details on Photography	53
5.1.1 Taking and Making Images	56
5.1.2 Site-Writing and Autoethnographic Writing	57
5.1.3 Archival Practices	58
5.1.4 Interviewing and Exhibiting	59
6. Conclusion	70
References	73
Appendix	83

Interview Transcripts	83
Published Articles	.89

List of Photographs:

Figures 13 to 140 accompanied by personal narrative writing are placed into a separate submission volume as examples of artistic practice.

- 1. Figure 1: Theartblog, 2018 We Tanjas the Lexicon of Tanjas Ostojic and the history of Yugoslavia (Video-stills from "Personal Space" video, 1998), Available at: https://www.theartblog.org/2018/01/we-tanjas-the-lexicon-of-tanjas-ostojic-and-the-history-of-yugoslavia/, (Accessed 12th of February 2019)
- 2. Figure 2: Artblog, 2018 We Tanjas the Lexicon of Tanjas Ostojic and the history of Yugoslavia (Video-stills from "Personal Space" video, 1998), Available at: https://www.theartblog.org/2018/01/we-tanjas-the-lexicon-of-tanjas-ostojic-and-the-history-of-yugoslavia/, (Accessed 12th of February 2019)
- 3. Figure 3: Telegraph, 2019, *It takes strong will power to do what I do* (digital image), Available at: *https://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/art/art-features/8609085/Marina-Abramovic-It-takes-strong-willpower-to-do-what-I-do.html*, (Accessed, 9th of May 2019)
- 4. Figure 4: Sanja Solunac, Dresses for War Rape Victims, collage on paper, 2019, Nis, Serbia
- 5. Figure 5: Sanja Solunac, Undershirt, acrylic, 2019, Nis, Serbia
- 6. Figure 6: Milena Krstic, Embroidery as a Female Principle, photographs, drawing and embroidery on paper, 2019, Nis, Serbia
- Figure 7: Happening.media, 2015, *The Death of a Nation the Serbian Pavilion in Venice, United Dead Nations*, (installation), photograph, Serbian Pavilion, Venice Biennale, (online), Available at: https://www.happening.media/category/magazine/en/articles/2930/the-death-of-a-nation-the-serbian-pavilion-in-venice, (Accessed 24th April 2020)
- Figure 8: Happening.media, 2017, *The Death of a Nation the Serbian Pavilion in Venice Transatlantica*, (paintings), 2 photographs, Serbian Pavilion *Enclavia*, Venice Biennale, (online), Available at: https://www.happening.media/category/magazine/en/articles/2930/the-death-of-a-nation-the-serbian-pavilion-in-venice, (Accessed 24th April 2020)
- Figure 9: Heralds, 2019, *Djordje Ozbolt, Regaining Memory Loss*, (installation), Serbian Pavilion, Venice Biennale, (online), Available at: http://www.heraldst.com/djordje-ozbolt, (Accessed 4th April 2020)
- 10. Figure 10: Modernism, *Rasa Todosijevic*, *Light and Darkness of Symbols*, Venice Biennale 2011, a still from Rasa's famous performance *Was Ist Kunst*? featuring Rasa's wife and artist Mariela Kozelj. Tate gallery in London bought the rights to show this performance in 2014, Available at : https://www.modernism.ro/2011/08/09/rasa-todosijevic-light-and-darkness-of-symbols-serbia-pavilion-the-54th-international-art-exhibition-of-the-venice-biennale/, (Accessed 10th of November 2020)

- 11. Figure 11: Modernism, Rasa Todosijevic, Light and Darkness of Symbols, Venice Biennale 2011, Available at : https://www.modernism.ro/2011/08/09/rasa-todosijevic-light-and-darkness-of-symbols-serbia-pavilion-the-54th-international-art-exhibition-of-the-venice-biennale/, (Accessed 10th of November 2020)
- Figure 12: Modernism, *Rasa Todosijevic*, *Light and Darkness of Symbols*, Venice Biennale 2011, Available at: https://www.modernism.ro/2011/08/09/rasa-todosijevic-light-and-darkness-of-symbols-serbia-pavilion-the-54th-international-art-exhibition-of-the-venice-biennale/, (Accessed 10th of November 2020)
- 13. Figure 13: On a Ferryboat, Adriatic Sea, 1986, photograph from my family's personal collection
- 14. Figure 14: *Thread from a camp bed*, microscope photographs, magnification X1000, samples taken from the camp bed used for camping in Ankaran, Slovenia, 2020, Ruma, Serbia
- 15. Figure 15: My Family House, autoethnographic photograph, 2019, Ruma, Serbia
- 16. Figure 16: My Family House, autoethnographic photograph, 2019, Ruma, Serbia
- 17. Figure 17: Remains of a Life, autoethnographic photograph, 2019, Ruma, Serbia
- 18. Figure 18: Black bag, microscope photographs, magnification X1000, 2021, Ruma, Serbia
- 19. Figure 19: Black bag, microscope photograph, magnification X1000, 2021, Ruma, Serbia
- 20. Figure 20: Black bag, microscope photograph, magnification X1000, 2021, Ruma, Serbia
- 21. Figure 21: Border, 1991, photograph taken from the archive collection of The County Museum in Ruma, Serbia
- 22. Figure 22: Border, 1991, photograph taken from the archive collection of The County Museum in Ruma, Serbia
- 23. Figure 23: Sports Hall, 1991, photograph taken from the archive collection of The County Museum in Ruma, Serbia
- 24. Figure 24: Refugees from Croatia in Ruma, 1991, photograph taken from the archive collection of The County Museum in Ruma, Serbia
- 25. Figure 25: Refugees from Croatia in Ruma, 1991, photograph taken from the archive collection of The County Museum in Ruma, Serbia
- 26. Figure 26: Exile and Old Age, 1991, photograph taken from the archive collection of The County Museum in Ruma, Serbia
- 27. Figure 27: Exile and Old Age, 1991, photograph taken from the archive collection of The County Museum in Ruma, Serbia
- 28. Figure 28: Old Age, 1991, photograph taken from the archive collection of The County Museum in Ruma, Serbia

- 29. Figure 29: Thread from my grandma's apron, microscope photograph, magnification X1000, 2021, Ruma, Serbia
- 30. Figure 30: Thread from my grandma's apron, microscope photographs, magnification X1000, 2021, Ruma, Serbia
- 31. Figure 31: *Downtown Novi Sad, Storm, a crime that still lasts*, autoethnographic photograph, street exhibition, photographers Martin Candir, image up, Ranko Cukovic, image down, 2019 Novi Sad, Serbia
- 32. Figure 32: Square of Daruvar's Defenders, autoethnographic photograph, 2019, Daruvar, Croatia
- 33. Figure 33: Non-Place Collective, Fringe Arts Bath 2020 festival, Available at: https://www.fringeartsbath.co.uk/nonplace?fbclid=lwAR3uUao4HriTWjq_yMd_kR1d4KkpmuWNHztKN0j2p_c5z-bkOlTXxhv8fjw
- 34. Figure 34: Non-Place Collective, Fringe Arts Bath 2020 festival, Available at: https://www.fringeartsbath.co.uk/nonplace?fbclid=lwAR3uUao4HriTWjg_yMd_kR1d4KkpmuWNHztKN0j2p_c5z-bkOlTXxhv8fjw
- 35. Figure 35: Non-Place Collective, Fringe Arts Bath 2021 festival, *This is not a Shop,* Available at: https://www.fringeartsbath.co.uk/events/this-is-not-a-shop-non-place-collective
- 36. Figure 36: The Lost Festivals, 2020, Available at: https://www.lacunafestivals.com/events.php?fbclid=lwAR30yjmyf9GnymcDQG1DTFwbWuaj0vdGYfAZUY7Ez3PmNVnGTn2WEEVomjY
- 37. Figure 37: The Restricted Past, autoethnographic photograph, abandoned bus station, 2019, Ruma, Serbia
- 38. Figure 38: The Restricted Past, autoethnographic photograph, abandoned bus station, 2019, Ruma, Serbia
- 39. Figure 39: Glass wool, microscope photographs of glass wool from the abandoned bus station (middle), magnification X1000, 2021, Ruma, Serbia
- 40. Figure 40: Glass wool, microscope photograph of glass wool from the abandoned bus station, magnification X1000, 2021, Ruma, Serbia
- 41. Figure 41: Stafeta (Baton) Day of Youth, 1964, Ruma, photograph taken from the archive collection of The County Museum in Ruma, Serbia
- 42. Figure 42: Memorial Place, autoethnographic photograph, 2021, graveyard, Ruma, Serbia
- 43. Figure 43: Chipped paint from a baton, microscope photograph, magnification X1000, 2021, graveyard, Ruma, Serbia
- 44. Figure 44: Chipped paint from a baton, microscope photographs, magnification X1000, 2021, graveyard, Ruma, Serbia
- 45. Figure 45: The Three Passports, blue- Croatian, red- Serbian, green- Nigerian, autoethnographic photograph, 2019, border between Serbia and Croatia

- 46. Figure 46: For Sale, autoethnographic photograph, 2019, Slavonija, Croatia
- 47. Figure 47: The War Games, autoethnographic photograph, 2018, Daruvar, Croatia
- 48.49. Figure 48 and 49: The War Games, shelled Serbian Church, autoethnographic photographs, 2019, Slavonija, Croatia
- 50. Figure 50: My Street, Knjaza Milosa, Ruma, Serbia, 2003, photograph taken from the archive collection of The County Museum in Ruma, Serbia
- 51. Figure 51: Room With a View, autoethnographic photographs, 2019, military base Minerska, Croatia
- 52. Figure 52: Room With a View, autoethnographic photographs, 2019, military base Minerska, Croatia
- 53. Figure 53: Pine needle, microscope photographs, magnification X1000, samples taken from Minerska beach, Croatia, 2021, Ruma, Serbia
- 54. Figure 54: Pine seed, microscope photographs, magnification X1000, samples taken from Minerska beach, Croatia, 2021, Ruma, Serbia
- 55. Figure 55: Remove the Flesh, Alexa Come Back Home, autoethnographic photographs, 2019, military base Minerska, Croatia
- 56. Figure 56: Street of Brotherhood and Equality, autoethnographic photographs, 2021, Ruma, Serbia
- 57. Figure 57: Treetop, autoethnographic photograph, 2021, Ruma, Serbia
- 58. Figure 58: Knjaza Milosa Street, autoethnographic photograph, 2021, Ruma, Serbia
- 59. Figure 59: Franz W,.1990. *Gasse, (Alley),* Rumaer Dokumentation 1745- 1945 Mittelpunkt der deutschen Bewegungin Syrmien, Slavonien and Kroatien, Band 1, Herausgegeben von der Donauschwäbischen, Kulturstiftung Stuttgart, p.40 (photograph)
- 60. Figure 60: Franz W., 1990. *Traubenpressen (Grape Pressing),* Rumaer Dokumentation 1745- 1945 Mittelpunkt der deutschen Bewegungin Syrmien, Slavonien and Kroatien, Band 1, Herausgegeben von der Donauschwäbischen, Kulturstiftung Stuttgart, p.31 (photograph)
- 61. Figure 61: The sense of childhood security and warmth gone forever, autoethnographic photographs, 2021, Ruma, Serbia
- 62. Figure 62: 1980 Winter, photograph taken from the archive collection of the County Museum in Ruma, Serbia
- 63. Figure 63: *Uterus Effects*, 2020, Verein Kustentropie, Vienna, Available at: https://fondacijasasamarceta.org/2020/05/11/uterus-effects/, Accessed 10th April 2021)

- 64. Figure 64: *Tree Seed*, microscope photographs, magnification X1000, samples taken from my street Knjaza Milosa, former Brotherhood and Equality, 2021, Ruma, Serbia
- 65. Figure 65: *Tree Seed*, microscope photograph, magnification X1000, samples taken from my street Knjaza Milosa, former Brotherhood and Equality, 2021, Ruma, Serbia
- 66. Figure 66: The Plaquette of Yugoslav Trade Union of Industry and Mining Workers, autoethnographic photograph, 2019, Ruma, Serbia
- 67. Figure 67: Thread, microscope photograph, magnification X1000, samples taken from my grandad's work uniform, 2021, Ruma, Serbia
- 68. Figure 68: Thread and Button, microscope photographs, magnification X1000, samples taken from my grandad's work uniform, 2021, Ruma, Serbia
- 69. Figure 69: Trade Union of Workers medal, (left) and a Membership booklet (right), autoethnographic photographs, 2019, Ruma, Serbia
- 70. Figure 70: The inside of the booklet with name and surname of my grandfather, Petar Puskas, profession- shoemaker, autoethnographic photograph, 2019, Ruma, Serbia
- 71. Figure 71: Membership fee for the Trade Union of Workers, collected on monthly basis, autoethnographic photograph, 2019, Ruma, Serbia
- 72. Figure 72: Workday in a shoe factory, my grandfather on the right, photograph from my family's personal collection, 2019, Ruma, Serbia
- 73. Figure 73: Public elections during Tito rule, my grandfather voting, photograph from my family's personal collection, 2019, Ruma, Serbia
- 74. Figure 74: *Tito and Yugoslavia are one*, photograph, *Politika* newspaper, 4th May 1980, the day Tito died," Tito and Yugoslavia are one", autoethnographic photographs, 2019, Ruma, Serbia
- 75. Figure 75: *Tito's photograph with communist slogan, Proletarians of all countries unite!* and communist symbols, five-pointed star with a sickle and a hammer, photograph from my family's personal collection, 2019, Ruma, Serbia
- 76. Figure 76: Order of Labour with silver wreath, with sickle and hammer, the symbol of communism, autoethnographic photographs, 2019, Ruma, Serbia
- 77. Figure 77: Certificate of the order awarded, issued by the Presidency of the Anti-Fascist Council of People's Liberation of Yugoslavia, Office for Medals,
- Belgrade, 1980, autoethnographic photograph, 2019, Ruma, Serbia
- 78. Figure 78: The ceremony of decorating the distinct members of the communist party with orders of labour, 1980, my grandfather, left, receiving the order,

photograph from my family's personal collection, 2019, Ruma, Serbia

- 79. Figure 79: My grandad and me, 1981, photograph from my family's personal collection, 2019, Ruma, Serbia
- 80. Figure 80: My grandparents and me, 1986, photograph from my family's personal collection, 2019, Ruma, Serbia
- 81. Figure 81: Decorated citizens and their wives posing under the slogan "And after Tito, Tito" photographs from my family's personal collection, 2019, Ruma, Serbia
- 82. Figure 82: Decorated citizens and their wives posing under the slogan "And after Tito, Tito" photographs from my family's personal collection, 2019, Ruma, Serbia
- 83. Figure 83: "Long live 29th November, Yugoslavia's birthday", my grandad Miroslav Kvaic, on the right, under the slogan: "Keep our brotherhood and equality, as an iris of your eye" photograph from my family's personal collection, 2019, Ruma, Serbia
- 84. Figure 84: Partisan and Pioneer caps with Yugoslav red star, autoethnographic photograph, 2020, antique shop, Old Market, Skopje, North Macedonia
- 85. Figure 85: Yugoslav flag, autoethnographic photograph, 2020, antique shop, Old Market, Skopje, North Macedonia
- 86. Figure 86: Yugoslav flag and a man begging, autoethnographic photograph, 2020, Old Market, Skopje, North Macedonia
- 87. Figure 87: Detail with Tito's drawing among the shop inventory and Yugoslavia Army Military Academy Officer's Uniform, autoethnographic photographs, 2020, Old Market, Skopje, North Macedonia
- 88. Figure 88: Voluntary Action in 1977 Yugoslavia, on the left my mother with a friend, photograph from my family's personal collection, 2019, Ruma, Serbia
- 89. Figure 89: Shoe Factory "Fruska Gora", Ruma, Yugoslavia, my grandmother Kvaic Milica with colleagues working, photograph from my family's personal collection, 2019, Ruma, Serbia
- 90. Figure 90: The inside of the Female Worker's Card Shoe Factory "Fruska Gora", Ruma, 1947 Yugoslavia, with the name of my grandmother Rakos Mara, autoethnographic photographs, 2019, Ruma, Serbia
- 91. Figure 91: My grandmother in 1944, age 16 working in a shoe factory, photograph from my family's personal collection, 2019, Ruma, Serbia
- 92. Figure 92: Women and Tito, my grandmother, Marija Puskas, second on the right, with colleagues, Ruma, photograph from my family's personal collection, 2019, Ruma, Serbia
- 93. Figure 93. Xenofeminism, School for Politics and Critique, 2020, Skopje, North Macedonia

- 94. Figure 94: An Orthodox and a Catholic cross, autoethnographic photographs, 2019, Ruma, Serbia
- 95. Figure 95: Memory of the first communion, Ivan Puskas, my father, 1956, Ruma, autoethnographic photograph, 2019, Ruma, Serbia
- 96. Figure 96: *Memory of the first communion*, Lanc Zvonko, my uncle (up); my grandmother with her sister (down), Kingdom of Yugoslavia, autoethnographic photographs, 2020, Ruma, Serbia
- 97. Figure 97: Catholic religious items: Virgin Mary, St Nikola, pray for Croatian people; postal stamp with St Sava, Orthodox saint, Virgin Mary, an item for prayer, autoethnographic photographs, 2019, Ruma, Serbia
- 98. Figure 98: *Tito's pioneers, during a school play*, around 1984, with my mother at the back as a teacher, "Ivo Lola Ribar" elementary school, Ruma, photograph from my family's personal collection, 2019, Ruma, Serbia
- 99. Figure 99: Thread from a pioneer scarf, microscope photographs, magnification X1000, 2021, Ruma, Serbia
- 100. Figure 100: Thread from a pioneer scarf, microscope photographs, magnification X1000, 2021, Ruma, Serbia
- 101. Figure 101: Thread from a pioneer scarf, microscope photographs, magnification X1000, 2021, Ruma, Serbia
- 102. Figure 102: Thread from a pioneer scarf, microscope photograph, magnification X1000, 2021, Ruma, Serbia
- 103. Figure 103: Thread from a pioneer scarf, microscope photographs, magnification X1000, 2021, Ruma, Serbia
- 104. Figure 104: Old postcard with the writing:" Long live Yugoslavia", some of my childhood drawings, autoethnographic photograph, 2019, Ruma, Serbia
- 105. Figure 105: 1986 Bukvar, with the photo of Tito, autoethnographic photograph, 2020, Ruma, Serbia
- 106. Figure 106: 1978 magazine Newsweek, "After Tito, What?", autoethnographic photograph, 2020, Ruma, Serbia
- 107. Figure 107: The relief of Tito, behind the old clock and old football boots, autoethnographic photograph, 2020, Old Market, Skoplje
- 108. Figure 108. *Where Do I Belong? on Belonging*, photography and text, part of a Nomadic online dialogue, Buffer Fringe Cyprus 2020, Nicosia, Available on the: http://www.researchcatalogue.net/view/976547/1043644..., (Accessed 10th October 2023)
- 109. Figure 109: Black as a Choice- the Colour of Sorrow, my great-grandmother, Mariska Puskas, on the right my grandad's sister, Evica Puskas, on the left, Sremska Mitrovica, Yugoslavia, photograph from my family's personal collection, 2020, Ruma, Serbia

- 110. Figure 110: Franz W.,1990. Service sign, Rumaer Dokumentation 1745- 1945 Mittelpunkt der deutschen Bewegungin Syrmien, Slavonien and Kroatien, Band 1, Herausgegeben von der Donauschwäbischen, Kulturstiftung Stuttgart, p.159 (photograph)
- 111. Figure 111: Franz W., 1990. Einheitstracht der Mädchen, (Girls' Uniform) 20. 4. 1941, Rumaer Dokumentation 1745- 1945 Mittelpunkt der deutschen Bewegungin Syrmien, Slavonien and Kroatien, Band 1, Herausgegeben von der Donauschwäbischen, Kulturstiftung Stuttgart, p.159 (photograph)
- 112. Figure 112: Franz W., 1990. *Jugendführer Brumm, Meldung an Ortsleiter Fürst, dahinter Major Strecker, Bürgermeister Serwatzy,* (Youth leader Brumm, reports to local manager Furst, behind him mayor Strecker, mayor Serwatzy) 20. 4. 1942 Rumaer Dokumentation 1745- 1945 Mittelpunkt der deutschen Bewegungin Syrmien, Slavonien and Kroatien, Band 1, Herausgegeben von der Donauschwäbischen, Kulturstiftung Stuttgart, p.163 (photograph)
- 113. Figure 113: Franz W., 1990. *Lehrkräfte und Schülerinnen,* (*Teachers and Students*), 20. 4. 1941 Rumaer Dokumentation 1745- 1945 Mittelpunkt der deutschen Bewegungin Syrmien, Slavonien and Kroatien, Band 1, Herausgegeben von der Donauschwäbischen, Kulturstiftung Stuttgart, p.160 (photograph)
- 114. Figure 114: Franz W., 1990. Begrüßung durch Jugendführer Brumm, (Welcome by Youth Leader Brumm) 20. 4. 1942 (Foto Ewald Serwatzy), Rumaer Dokumentation 1745- 1945 Mittelpunkt der deutschen Bewegungin Syrmien, Slavonien and Kroatien, Band 1, Herausgegeben von der Donauschwäbischen, Kulturstiftung Stuttgart, p.164 (photograph)
- 115. Figure 115: My family house attic and a box which hid my great-grandfather's existence, autoethnographic photographs, 2019, Ruma, Serbia
- 116. Figure 116: Verona, the lost family name, photograph from my family's personal collection, (my great grandfather, on the left) 2020, Ruma, Serbia
- 117. Figure 117: New Year, photographs from my family's personal collection, 2020, Ruma, Serbia
- 118. Figure 118: New Year, photographs from my family's personal collection, 2020, Ruma, Serbia
- 119. Figure 119: Franz W.,1990. Mastschwein mit 445 kg (Fattening pig to 445 kg), Rumaer Dokumentation 1745- 1945 Mittelpunkt der deutschen Bewegungin Syrmien, Slavonien and Kroatien, Band 1, Herausgegeben von der Donauschwäbischen, Kulturstiftung Stuttgart, p.19 (photograph)
- 120. Figure 120: Flower Petal, microscope photographs, magnification X1000, 2021, Ruma, Serbia
- 121. Figure 121: The Memory of crisis, Ruma during the 1990s, photograph taken from the archive collection of The County Museum in Ruma, Serbia
- 122. Figure 122: What About the Empty Space? autoethnographic photographs, 2019, my family house, Ruma, Serbia

- 123. Figure 123: Broken Glass, microscope photograph, magnification X1000, samples taken from my family house, 2021, Ruma, Serbia
- 124. Figure 124: Broken Glass, microscope photograph, magnification X1000, samples taken from my family house, 2021, Ruma, Serbia
- 125. Figure 125: Broken Glass, microscope photograph, magnification X1000, samples taken from my family house, 2021, Ruma, Serbia
- 126. Figure 126: 78 days, Ruma, 1999, a bombed down site, taken from the archive collection of The County Museum in Ruma, Serbia
- 127. Figure 127: Song kept us alive, 78 days, Ruma town centre, 1999, photograph taken from the archive collection of The County Museum in Ruma, Serbia
- 128. Figure 128: 78 days, Ruma town centre, 1999, photograph taken from the archive collection of The County Museum in Ruma, Serbia
- 129. Figure 129: 78 days, A bombed down American plane, Budjanovci village, 1999, taken from the archive collection of The County Museum in Ruma, Serbia
- 130. Figure 130: 78 days, A bombed down American plane, Budjanovci village, 1999, taken from the archive collection of The County Museum in Ruma, Serbia
- 131. Figure 131: Bilo, ne ponovilo se, autoethnographic photographs, 2020, Belgrade city centre, Serbia
- 132. Figure 132: Bilo, ne ponovilo se, autoethnographic photographs, 2020, Belgrade city centre, Serbia
- 133. Figure 133: Roots and Reach Conference, Manchester Metropole University, 2020, Manchester UK.
- 134. Figure 134: PARSE, Conference on Violence, 2021, Sweden, Available at: https://parsejournal.com/event/the-fourth-biennial-parse-research-conference/ (Accessed 10th October 2023)
- (
- 135. Figure 135: PARSE, Conference on Violence, 2021, Sweden, Available at: https://parsejournal.com/event/the-fourth-biennial-parse-research-conference/
- (Accessed 10th October 2023)
- 136. Figure 136: Street as a Home, autoethnographic photograph, 2019, Nottingham, UK
- 137. Figure 137: Before You Close Your Eyes, autoethnographic photograph, 2019, Nottingham, UK
- 138. Figure 138: Defeated, autoethnographic photograph, 2020, road close to Stejanovci village, Serbia

- 139. Figure 139: Memory of a past struggle, autoethnographic photograph, 2020, road close to Stejanovci village, Serbia
- 140. Figure 140: They have so much to tell, photograph from my family's personal collection, 2020, Ruma, Serbia
- 141. Figure 141: Home, Symposium, 2022, University of Glouchestershire, UK
- 142. Figure 142: Feminist Art Colony in Sicevo, Serbia, photographs taken by members of the Centre for Girls
- 143. Figure 143: *Art takes no restrictions*, 2019, Exhibition of artworks made at the fifth *Feminist Art Colony* in Sicevo, Nis Cultural Centre, Nis, Serbia, photographs taken by members of *the Centre for Girls*
- 144. Figure 144: 14th PitchWise Female Art and Activism Festival, Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina, 2020, Available at: https://www.sarajevotimes.com/opening-womens-art-activism-festival-pitchwise/
- 145. Figure 145: *The Butterfly Effect*, Exhibition of artworks made during the sixth Feminist Art Colony, 2020, Cultural Centre Leskovac, Leskovac, Serbia, photographs taken by members of *the Centre for Girls*
- 146. Figure 146: Solo exhibition Chasing Ghosts, 2022, Blunk Galleri, Trondheim, Norway
- 147. Figure 147: Lost Stories, 2020, Surface gallery, Nottingham, UK
- 148. Figure 148: CCFT displacement Buffer Fringe, part of a Nomadic online dialogue, 2021, Nicosia, Cyprus

1. INTRODUCTION

The main aim of this research is to provide a personal testimony by creating artworks which narrate my story to preserve my memory of my experience of Yugoslavia and offer representations of it in the field of contemporary art, through the creation of artefacts, events, exhibitions, and critical written reflections, and to contribute to the developing pacifist female voice. The objectives required to conduct this research are to generate photographs, through the ongoing production, supported by the critical reflection and analysis through the written thesis, in order to develop my art practice which addresses the issues of my identity in terms of collective belonging and loss, and to present my narrative about the experience of Yugoslavia through the series of practice-based research and the use of autoethnography as a method.

This research addresses the issues surrounding the Yugoslav Civil war and the "Merciful Angel" bombing operation of Serbia by NATO in 1999 and offers my personal narrative in relation to loss as a result of war and sanctions in the nineties. It thus focuses on the female voice to present a story about the Yugoslav people, their ways of life and the society which once was, but no longer remains, having been followed by the subsequent reestablishment of patriarchal values with the start of the Yugoslav Civil war. Photographic practice-based research offers both autoethnographic and ethnographic visual narrative to present pre- and post- war Yugoslav society and the political circumstances surrounding it. Photographic practice offers an insight into the lives of people during communism through my work with archives and the photographs which originate from my personal family possession. At the same time, microscope photography brings a unique contribution through my emotional response to what Yugoslavia was in my experience. In addition to photographic practice and the personal narrative, autoethnography and site writing as research methods are also employed to present the Yugoslav culture and society, its values and finally their disappearance.

The complexity of issues addressed by the research question of how my practice-based research can generate artworks in relation to complex issues of war, loss, identity and belonging, arising from the specificity of the Yugoslav social context that I experienced, in order to contribute to the contemporary representation of conflict? allowed photography to be fully placed at the core of this research. The research is, therefore, developed and constituted by four specific types of photographs:

1.microscope photographs, 2. family archival photography, sourced from my personal family archive, 3. archival photographic material, sourced from the Ruma County Museum archives in Serbia and 4. autoethnographic photographs of sites and objects associated with Yugoslavia. These four types of photography combined, are a valuable means to visually investigate the testimony of my experience of Yugoslavia. In addition to these, photographic documentation of exhibitions, conferences, and online events in which the research was presented, is outlined, and presented in section 5 Body of Practice and in section 6.4 Interviewing and Exhibiting.

Therefore, photography is crucial to this research as it is a visual autoethnographic narrative and a source of meaning making through a visual exploration into the issues set in the research question. Each of these photographs brings a contribution to preserve a memory of Yugoslavia and at the same time visually explores the complex issues of identity, loss and belonging.

1.1 Personal Narrative

"Storytelling is an activity which 'reveals meaning without committing the error of defining it" (Arendt 1970, p.44).

Following Benjamin's idea of storytelling as a gift (Benjamin 1955, p.378) my intention is to go back and retell the circumstances of my life during and after Yugoslavia, and therefore, my personal individual testimony is the core component of this research. As a witness of Yugoslav Civil War and the

breakup of Yugoslavia, I aim to contribute to contemporary art practices and dialogues, by presenting a personal narrative to address the issues of loss, memory and belonging that marked the historical chapter surrounding the Yugoslav Civil war. I turn to art as a method to explore these issues and to present my female understanding of them, create photographs and use my art practice and my written words to create this research. By drawing on works of Benjamin and Barthes, outlined in methodology, I situated the practice.

1.2 Practice

Even though in everyday life humans mostly observe things on the surface, there is a whole world right before our eyes, yet invisible to us and thus easily forgotten. A microscope is traditionally used for scientific purposes, but in this research, it is used to depict otherwise unidentifiable aspects of human experience and through a series of microscope images, to present the narrative of what used to be Yugoslavia. Photomicroscopy in its simplest form is a high magnification photography, which in practice involves the use of a microscope to magnify images, followed by using a camera for image capture, to look under the surface of things, to find out what they are made of and what they look like inside.

In the microscopic world things can be observed from the inside out, take new unique appearances and unexpected connections to what we already know. Observing life through a microscope is a unique adventure with an element of a surprise. The challenge is how to capture this invisible world and use it to tell a story. Is it possible to chase ghosts hidden in this world by making the invisible visible, and not only translate the inside of things, but also experiences and emotions into images to narrate a story?

In that sense, my thesis in its focus has practice-based art and artistic representation in the form of photography alongside personal narration. The practice-based research focuses on the female interpretation of Yugoslav Civil war and offers and analyses my personal experience in relation to loss and disappearance. It focuses on my inner ghosts of the old times, people, ways of life, buildings and human artifacts belonging to the historical period of communist Yugoslavia which once were, yet no longer remain, while the personal narrative is made of intercepted fragments of memory, pieced together like elements of a jigsaw. The people and spaces lost, things that might have been- the ghosts inside. Therefore, the aim of photographs is to contribute to the new knowledge in this respect.

The narrative includes the experiences of other people whose destinies marked my life story. Our testimonies are interconnected, as the same era and geographic location shaped them, and they are derived from the consequences of conflicts and migrations during and after the Yugoslav Civil War and the Bombing of Serbia in 1999. The issues presented in this research are intertwined and intersected, entering the sphere of one another. Loss of identity, loss of sense of belonging, loss of possessions, physical life and dignity, are mutually inclusive and as such interwoven within the thesis. They occur and reoccur and are at times determined by the quality of my memories presented through the written narrative.

1.3 Autoethnography

This research is autoethnographic, as it uses my personal experience as a starting point of my research, but also ethnographic, as it presents the culture and society in ex- Yugoslavia and after the Yugoslav Civil War. As such, it is structured as a collage, intersected by my memories presented through the written narrative and photographic practice-based research with photographs that serve as a document or as an emotional response to the events described. Methodology, literature review of other artists' artefacts and visual documentation of the ways in which I shared the research, are placed in separate chapters, to ensure academic rigour, as they are used to test the validity of my claims in the written text. These elements merge into my story, a female version of my accounts of war and my search for identity.

1.4 Site-writing

In addition, this research employs site-writing, to present my female voice and my version of the events surrounding the Yugoslav Civil war. At the same time, visiting sites related to what Yugoslavia once was in my experiences, allows associations to develop into the written word. Sites are important elements both as starting points of narrative writing, which at times results from my memories, but are also crucial to practice-based exploration. Via field trips to specific sites in ex-Yugoslav countries: Croatia, Serbia, and Northern Macedonia, I used places as sources of associations to compose the personal narrative and as starting points for the creation of photographs, especially for the development of microscope photography, as an artistic medium used with the intention of presenting my emotional response to what Yugoslavia once was in my experience. The most important site, which the focus was placed on, is my hometown Ruma in Serbia, as a metaphor of Yugoslavia before and during the conflict. I created a new body of visual and written knowledge about my town to present a unique micro cosmos which depicts circumstances of life in Yugoslavia before and after its dissolution.

Therefore, photographs sourced from museum archives in my hometown in Ruma, Serbia, and from my family's personal archives, proved to be highly relevant in order to identify and recall the ghosts of past times. Working with museum archives, helped me to identify a serious gap in knowledge and this became evident once I realised that there is almost nothing written about the conflict in Yugoslavia in relation to my town and I noticed, that there is a need for this story to be written.

Practice-based research, alongside narrative writing, addresses the challenges that time brings, and as such, questions the notion of change, whether this refers to the change in the set of Yugoslav beliefs and values or identities through time. This was mine and the case of the people who were around me during Yugoslavia, who got to requestion who we thought we were or who we were told that we were supposed to be. What me and some of the people who shared these experiences related to the dissolution of Yugoslavia have in common, is this collective trauma, and thus my hometown Ruma is used as a microcosm of a wider narrative of Yugoslavia that has not yet been told. By depicting the circumstances of our lives in and around my hometown, which is a starting point of this research, my aim is to build a body of knowledge about Yugoslavia, through the visual and written narrative. By using this specific site, my hometown, I aim to present the broader circumstances surrounding the historical period of Yugoslavia through my first-hand testimony.

1.5 Trauma

The notion of trauma both individual and collective is integral to this research, as for me, it is deeply connected to my experience of loss resulting from the dissolution of my country. While writing up my personal narrative, on more than one occasion I noticed that writing enhances my understanding of past situations. It is my intention to test the claims of Custer (2014) that personal narrative is a means of growing and transformation and that writing autoethnography inevitably provides therapeutic benefits and helps overcome trauma.

2. KEY ISSUES EXPLORED

2.1 Identity, Loss and Belonging

Personal narrative writing related to issues of loss, and the inter-related relationship between belonging and identity in relation to Yugoslav social context, alongside practice, is in the core of this research and the aim is to contest the more generic prevailing narratives.

Considering that this research is based on the individual viewpoint and the society surrounding the life and conflict in Yugoslavia, autoethnography proved to be an extremely powerful methodological tool. Nevertheless, the process of writing was of a contradictory nature for me, as I took on a task of presenting a narrative about belonging while constantly feeling the absence of a firm and solid ground for the claims of belonging, writing about displacement when being displaced over and over again, writing about identity while in a constant guest for the defining features of my own identity and observing it only as contours, but never as a clear image, writing about loss while having experienced it on so many levels. On the other hand, the very fact that these issues are very tangible points in my life, makes this research genuine and I believe that it opens questions for a further dialogue on complexity and instability of notions of belonging, identity, and displacement. For me this research is not only academic. It is deeply personal as it tackles extremely painful and fragile issues. In that sense, autoethnography allowed me to recognize a unique ghost within myself. It is the ghosts of past traumas related to my experience of loss of my country, my belonging, and my fixed idea of identity. Although this ghost might be related to past times, lost people, or lost things, it is very much alive inside of me. This ghost of darkness occupies the same space as me and we are one. At times, I imagine that I can see its shape and recognize its face within the complexity of my thoughts. Even though, for me, it is hard to fully define whether this ghost originates out of trauma or is a direct consequence of war, but I know that for me, recognising its existence is what writing a native account is about. For me, writing a native account as an insider, means seeing my own horror and giving it shape using words while at the same time seeing the same horror in my closest friends and the society in which we were raised. In relation to this, the notion of "home' is never a tangible one and as a person and an autoethnographer, I never feel quite at home. In my experience, me and my closest friends who are of similar age as I am, are the children of the Yugoslavia nineties, the lost orphans of communism and most of us remain in a constant struggle to find ourselves. What me and my family and friends have in common, is this same black ghost of collective trauma. Even though we desire and feel that after surviving the horrors of a war reality, we deserve peace, it does not come to us easily. We have been correlating with chaos for too long to let it go so easily. even now in the absence of war. In that sense and for me, writing my individual story meant writing the story around the Yugoslav society. In relation to this, my stance concerning the ethical question around speaking for the other, is that a person without this ghost inside cannot write an auto ethnography on war and in my opinion the importance of a native account is the most evident in this respect.

Writing auto ethnographic narrative was a challenging task but also a rewarding one. It offered me understanding and forgiving. It allowed me to externalise the inner monologue and give it a possibility to turn into a dialogue. It also allowed an understanding and accepting that there are not always fixed answers and that, at times, fixity is an illusion, therefore, we can only settle with questions which lead to open dialogues. Questions remain in the absence of definite answers, and I based my writing on this fact. One of the most valuable lessons I picked up during this research, is that the issues of belonging, identity, displacement, loss, and trauma are features that mark more than only my autoethnographic research. These issues have become so complex and relevant that they are in the focus of works of many autoethnographers, and during the research process, I realised I share the challenge of presenting them with many other researchers who requestion the instability of the modern world. On multiple occasions, I made attempts to validate my research and exploit the opportunity to share my findings, in order to make sure that the questions I ask in this research are very contemporary and relevant to current debates. The value of this research is in the fact that it can potentially open up a further

dialogue on these relevant issues with other numerous identified researchers who deal with belonging, identity and displacement. This research does not necessarily offer solutions, but it poses relevant questions and uses the force of artistic visual expression to preserve the memory of one historical era and the emotional response to the loss of it. In addition, it uses a female voice and a first-hand personal account to offer an alternative view to the prevailing narrative related to what used to be Yugoslavia.

Dealing with these open-ended questions about deeply fluid notions such as belonging, made me realise that I am not alone in this quest. In this sense, the dialogue is crucial as it allows other researchers, artists, and practitioners to share their understanding of these issues. This exchange of experiences and the mutual understanding of non-fixity made me feel as if I finally belong among those who cannot settle without answers and among those who continuously pose questions. This was one of the most rewarding points in this journey- willingness to forgive myself for not belonging.

2.2 Female Voice

The Yugoslav Civil war was world-renowned for its horrors and immense brutality, ethnic cleansing, mass rapes, lost homelands, lost hope, and identity- both national and gender. As such, it had a great impact on both feminists and women across the world and its effects had a huge transnational importance (Batinić 2001). With regards to this and as a response to war, certain Serbian women, pacifists, and artists appeared on the public scene using art to criticize the patriarchal nature of the society and war and thus act against it (Martin 2012). This emerging female voice represents a unique step of acknowledgment, responsibility, and memory. The importance of this research lies in contributing to new knowledge by presenting original artistic artefact and a written testimony to add to the female voice in this respect.

According to traditional academic male-centred forms of scholarship based on male systems of logic and morality, female writing is more personalized but as such, might at times, be silenced and delegitimized (Blair, Brown and Baxter 1994, p.389). The "male paradigm" is characterized by "impersonal abstraction". (Blair, Brown and Baxter 1994, p.389). Contrary to masculine energy that "intimidates, constrains, demands, objectifies, and enforces, "the energies working through this writing are entirely feminine" (Custer 2014, p.4). This female energy can create the potential to allow vulnerability to emerge and subjectivity as an element of theoretical work. The feminine voice inside guides the process of writing about events from the past, some of which were buried deep within (Custer 2014).

Jane Rendell (2001) in her essay *Conductor: a tribute to the angels, Jane Prophet: 'Conductor'*, quotes Rosi Braidotti and Luce Irigaray, the two feminists who explore the relationship between space and subjectivity and state that these two categories are naturally connected. In their opinion, women were confined by male principles of logic, law, and language. As a consequence of this or/and resulting from it, they started questioning the organization of patriarchal time and space. They started rethinking it and accepting "a kind of knowingness or unknowingness that refuses fixity that allows us to think between, or to think 'as if'. These female researchers are mediators who, contrary to male approaches, "go between and bridge rather that cut through" (Rendell 2001).

In this respect, the research is, to a degree, influenced and inspired by the voice of feminists, pacifists, and female artists and therefore, their activities and a myriad of their artworks are identified and documented through literature review, interviews, discussions and field trips which greatly helped inform my art practice. In relation to this, my inspiration to pursue the female voice and thus contribute to it, was also fuelled by the protests and performances by Women in Black, an organization founded in Belgrade in 1991, with the intention to fight militarism and violence which followed the Yugoslav Civil war by peaceful means (Womeninblack 2023). Using performance as an art form to criticise the war operations of Yugoslav National Army (JNA), they called for acceptance of responsibility, and they protested against one of the crucial elements of the patriarchal society- the image of women as victims who accept the passive role in war (Papic 1994).

Activities of the peace movement Women in Black focus on the question of who is protected within the conflict, gendered feminine usually being protected by gendered masculine. Therefore, their activities deal with the gendered war roles and the unequal relationship of protector/protected (Tickner 1993, p. 271).

Women in Black also recognised the importance of dealing with the phenomenon of trauma and worked with women who survived war atrocities, refugees, and women victims of domestic violence. During the nineties, the war years in the region, they organised annual meetings of solidarity against war, nationalism and violence and these meetings were attended by regional and international peace activists (Korać 2016, p. 433).

Similar activities with the aim of preserving memory of the genocide and taking responsibility by remembering the victims were organized in Belgrade, Serbia. *The Candle Lighting Ceremony* by the Youth Initiative managed to survive for four entire months, gathering between 50 and several hundred participants. (Licht, Drakulic 2018).

This alternative way of thinking and acting from the outside of the patriarchal male power system, as in the case of activities of Women in Black and some other international peace movements such as Code Pink, can lead to challenging the existing order thus changing it (Makdisi 2008, p.109).

The research, using my family archives and autoethnography as a research method, also touches on the role of women in and after the Second World war in Yugoslavia, which was a crucial event that led to the emancipation of women as the consequence of their involvement in combat and rebuilding the Yugoslav society after the war. The Yugoslav society with its rich cultural and music scene, allowed women to enter the public sphere, regardless of the subsequent reestablishment of the patriarchal values which followed the Yugoslav Civil war. I find origins of the developing female voice in this rich cultural scene which emerged during Yugoslavia, and it is my belief that its relevance needs to be noted and nurtured.

These female artists and pacifists act as true fighters against the oblivion of reality and use the power of art and activism in the most noble way -to convey the message of peace. In that respect, artworks by various, predominately female artists, some of which were exhibited over the previous two decades in the Venice Biennale Yugoslavia pavilion, informed the research. Some of these artists, such as Marina Abravomic, Tanja Ostojic, use performance art and by acting in public, show comments on everyday life and political situation. This new contemporary art practice, sometimes interdisciplinary in nature, establishes contact with science, technology, and society. Under socio- political, economic, and cultural influence, it exchanges vast amount of information. Therefore, its role is crucial to social change (Kojic, Mladenov 2011).

These findings informed my research and served to enrich my knowledge of the current art practice and to acquire an insight into how other artists and pacifists dealt with the issues set in the research question,

Regardless of the overall crises of cultural and human values, art in the nineties did not perish. It persisted regardless of the hardships of war violence, human rights violations, state oppression, destruction of economy and the forces of international sanctions and NATO's bombing of Serbia. Even under the weight of those challenges, Serbian art remained as radical as ever, and artists used creativity to react to the challenges of reality and reflect on how ideology and power structures obstructed social life (Ross 2018).

Tanja Ostojić and Marina Abramovic, two Serbian female performance artists, were the true opposites to the folk singers, who used their body as a tool for success and financial gain, while at the same time confirming the rise of patriarchal values, on the war torn Yugoslav cultural scene. These

two artists went further from simply performing their experience, and their performances also worked towards creating their identities. The self that they exposed through a performative action, is not a neutral one, but rather a gendered, sexualized self which represents a female subject over the last four decades of the feminist movement. According to Stokic (2004, p. 395), the anger of women's movement starting from the 1970s was directed towards the instrumentalization and "the objectification of a female body as a strategy of oppression by patriarchal institutions". Furthermore, "the body that re-emerged in all its dirty glory is a sexed, gestured, painted, and performed body" (Stokic 2004, p. 395).

These artists used their bodies as vessels of exploration of the notion of beauty and as a means of response to the madness of the post Yugoslav society. They accepted the challenges imposed by the society, reacted to them and in that manner performed their identity, thus using their critical art practices as a means of examination of female identity. By exposing their bodies, they exposed patriarchy and these performative strategies returned the voice to the body, breaking the myth of female beauty devoid of agency, thus reconsidering the notion of beauty (Stokic, 2004, p.387).

Tanja Ostojic, a Serbian performance artist gave her response to the chaos of Serbian life in the nineties, in her performance *Personal Space*, in 1996 by standing for 60 minutes, covered in marble dust. Completely shaven, she stood as a statue, and through this performative action, offered her unconformity to the circumstances surrounding the society in the nineties (Ross 2018).

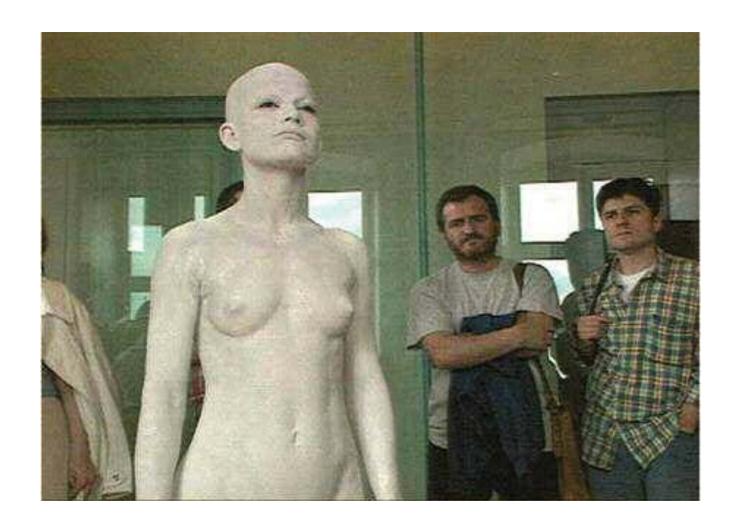


Figure 1: Tanja Ostojic, "Personal Space" performance, Theartblog, 2018 We Tanjas the Lexicon of Tanjas Ostojic and the history of Yugoslavia (Video-stills from "Personal Space" video, 1998), Available at: https://www.theartblog.org/2018/01/we-tanjas-the-lexicon-of-tanjas-ostojic-and-the-history-of-yugoslavia/, (Accessed 12th of February 2019)

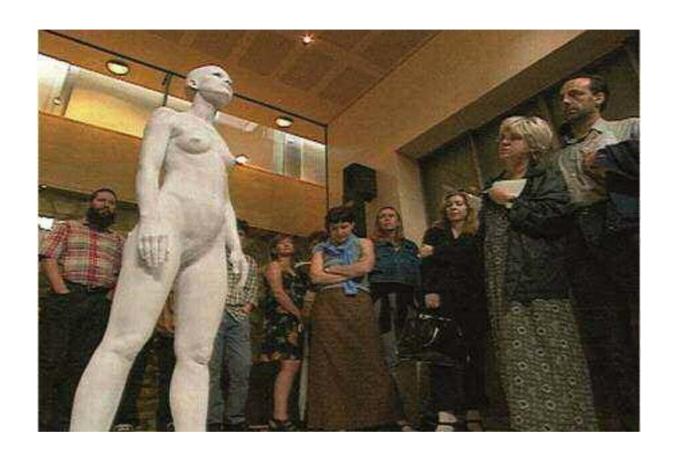


Figure 2: Tanja Ostojic, "Personal Space" performance, Artblog, 2018 We Tanjas the Lexicon of Tanjas Ostojic and the history of Yugoslavia (Video-stills from "Personal Space" video, 1998), Available at: https://www.theartblog.org/2018/01/we-tanjas-the-lexicon-of-tanjas-ostojic-and-the-history-of-yugoslavia/, (Accessed 12th of February 2019)

Marina Abramovic, in the performance *The Balkan Baroque*, universalised the subjectivity of a single experience, gave a new voice and interpretation to war and ethnic cleansing, and emphasized the communicative role of art (Avgita 2012). The performance was a part of Venice Biennale 1997 exhibition and it consisted of three video projections which tackled the theme of trauma and violence. In front of them the artist was sitting, scrubbing 1500 beef bones, singing folk songs from Yugoslavia while mourning and weeping. The piece is a response to the ethnic cleansing in Bosnia during the Yugoslav Civil war. It addresses loss that can never be mourned and tucked away. Through performative repetition, a transformative space is created in which death becomes approachable (Ross 2013).

Quoting Abramovic (2022) "The whole idea that by washing bones and trying to scrub the blood, is impossible. You cannot wash the blood from your hands as you cannot wash the shame from the war. But also, it was important to transcend it, that can be used, this image, for any war, anywhere in the world "(Moma 2022).

During the 1960s-70s, Yugoslavia witnessed a new art movement emerging, with conceptualism as its focus. This new art practice was characterised through the emergence and combination of different artistic expressions, such as performance, body art and video art. The goal was to reject the idea of art as a commodity which can be bought such as paintings and sculptures. This new art movement embraced the new values of creativity in Yugoslavia by using new media and requestioning the current art scene and society in general.

These artists' activities are in the post-socialist art history explained through the prism of their dissident activities and their work was seen as a resistance to the administrative- bureaucratic apparatus proclaimed by the socialist self-management (Krstic 2018). They opposed both the system and the way art was thought at the official art institutions, and they made a shift in the focus to the artist as a subject and to the power of his or her voice as an author or "first-person art". This approach led to introducing new media such as performance, body art, photography, and film (Krstic 2018).

In the forefront of this change were *The Belgrade Six*, conceptual artists who graduated from the Academy of Fine Arts in Belgrade in 1971. The collective included Marina Abramović, Neša Paripovic, Zoran Popovic, Slobodan Era Milivojevic, Rasa Todosijevic and Gera Urkom. They valued concept rather than material production and in Abramovic's words: "What the six of us would talk about, obsessively, was a way passed (sic) painting: a way to put life itself into art" (Manatakis 2018).

Their art was highly politicised and unforgiving as it reflected the state of the society. Many artists and cultural practitioners left ex- Yugoslavia, among them Marina Abramovic (USA) and Gera Urkom (UK). Regardless of the fact that they were often silenced by the police during Tito's dictatorship and the Civil War in the nineties, these artists prevailed and acted as true rebels through their art practices which shed light on the darkness of the Yugoslav pre- and post-war society (Manatakis 2018).



Figure 3: Marina Abramovic, "The Balkan Baroque" performance, Telegraph, 2019, *It takes strong will power to do what I do* (digital image), Available at: https://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/art/art-features/8609085/Marina-Abramovic-It-takes-strong-willpower-to-do-what-I-do.html, (Accessed, 9th of May 2019)

This research was also informed by the activities of the *Centre for Girls* in Niš, Serbia and the participation at the *Feminist Art Colony* in Sicevo, Serbia. The first colony in Sicevo was held in the period from June 23 to June 29, 2015, with the goal to encourage 12 young female artists to get familiar with feminist issues, and then introduce those issues into their work, to enable them to create together, get to know one another and connect, and to secure them a public space where they can exhibit their art. During the residency at the *Feminist Art Colony* in 2019 and 2020, I conducted 16 interviews with the purpose of supporting and informing my art practice and identifying the female voice of artists from the social context of ex- Yugoslavia. These interviews were carefully coded, transcribed and translated into English. However, during the research process, I decided to use only 2 interviews instead of the previously intended 5, as after careful coding, I realised that some of the interviews previously included seem too broad and do not fully correspond to the issues covered in this research. Therefore, the final selection was based on the art practice which best relates to the issues addressed in the research question. The interviewed female artists are Milena Krstic, who explores the issues of fear, as her father fought in the Yugoslav Civil War, and Sanja Solunac, who worked with women victims of rape during the Yugoslav war and who subsequently created artworks that revolve around trauma and art therapy.



Figure 4: Sanja Solunac, *Dresses for War Rape Victims*, collage on paper, 2019, Nis, Serbia Figure 5: Sanja Solunac, *Undershirt*, acrylic, 2019, Nis, Serbia



Figure 6: Milena Krstic, Embroidery as a Female Principle, photographs, drawing and embroidery on paper, 2019, Nis, Serbia

2.3 Historic 'Truth' and Subjective Experience

This personal narrative investigates the culture and time surrounding the conflict in Yugoslavia but also gives evidence, in the form of both site writing texts and photography, about political circumstances which result from the dissolution of Yugoslavia and have impact in the present. Therefore, it focuses on both, the past and the present to depict the social relations during and after Yugoslavia. As Benjamin (1974) states to articulate what is past, does not only mean to recognise what it really was like, but it also means "to take control of a memory, as it flashes in a moment of danger". Here, in this very statement, lies the value and the contribution to new knowledge of this research, as my attempt is to capture my own memories and save them from the danger of their disappearance, because "the true picture of the past whizzes by. Only as a picture, which flashes its final farewell in the moment of its recognisability, is the past to be held fast" (Benjamin 1974, p. 2).

In relation to this, I want to pose an ethical question of speaking for 'other'. I want to explore how I observed situations where the people of Yugoslavia I knew, went through two stages- pure good and pure evil. Two extreme opposites. How far would someone have to travel to understand this? Back into the past? - to live in communism first, to feel that we honestly loved each other, to see how we openly lived together, to witness that our doors were not closed, never locked, to realise that we trusted our neighbour and to feel how we felt they too are our extended family. Only then would it be possible to realise that there is no right or wrong. There are just ordinary people who always suffer the most and only they will tell the truth, their own truth which may be very different than the historic 'truth' and the official account. In war there are as many truths as there are experiences. I do not believe in the divisions of truth, which is a stubborn occurrence within any conflict; their truth and our truth. With regards to this, I am aware that I might be looked down on, and classified as Serbian, or Croatian, regarding my narrative and based on what I have written. While doing this research, it was extremely difficult and impossible for me not to think of those harmed and damaged by hatred, by misfortunes, by loss, by killings, scared by tragedies and loss of home. I would think of the women raped, children killed and massacred during the Yugoslav Civil war. Being both Serbian and Croatian, I tried to make constant efforts to retain my objectivity while constructing my narrative, but in my opinion, I can remain objective up to a point and only because I was not completely damaged by the Yugoslav Civil war. I was lucky not to be killed. I was lucky not to be directly displaced like my extended family members, Croatians in Serbia. I was lucky not to be forced to leave my homeland, like Serbians in Croatia. I was lucky not to be hit by the bombs during the NATO bombing of Serbia in 1999. While thinking about the war victims' families, I am struggling to understand how life continued for them. How do you continue life after you lose a child, a husband, a brother, or a sister? This is beyond comprehension. In war, every person goes through their own horror. I fear generalisations because my experience thought me how dangerous they are. They lead to hatred, and they are a direct path into conflict. Therefore, as this research is highly subjective, at times. I doubt my objectivity, question my motives, and feel vulnerable.

According to Chang (2008, p.51) one of the dangers of writing autoethnography is in narrowing down the research merely to descriptive autobiography or memoir. To avoid this, access to intimate personal information gained from my work with photographs retrieved from my personal family archives, museum archives from my hometown and microscope photography allowed me to conduct an in-depth investigation into the identified cultural interpretation of life in Yugoslavia, communist ideology, and its subsequent passage into a conflict. In that sense the photographic practice-based research provides a distinction between my memory as a protagonist, placed within the centre of events, and history which often tends to be distorted. The photographic practice-based research provides a visual corresponding part to history, but also evidence contrary to the prevailing narrative.

According to McKinnon (2013, p.11), autoethnography allows context related observations such as space, place, and historical relations, and my intention is to present precisely these aspects related to what Yugoslavia once was. Autoethnography combined with practice-based research as my choice of methodology, enables me to explore and construct my proposed critical narratives. In this sense, the combination of autoethnography and

visual personal narrative offers a fuller picture in which meaning and relationships between people, places and events are to be presented and more likely "told than inferred" (Laslett 1999, p. 391).

2.3.1 Stadium and Punctum in Relationship to Objective Historic 'Truth' and Subjective Experience

According to Olin (2002), to explain two ways in which photography could exist, Barthes uses two Latin terms *stadium* and *punctum*. The stadium stands for the field of educational and cultural possibilities, whilst punctum is an element which pierces and breaks the cultural field by turning it into personal. The punctum is always personal to the beholder (Olin 2002, p.101).

It is by stadium that we enjoy photographs as good historical scenes, and participate culturally in the figures, faces, actions, and settings. However, the second element- punctum is what breaks or pierces the stadium as an element which shoots out of it and punctures an observer like an arrow which creates a wound. Therefore, punctum is that element in a photograph which pierces and creates a sort of a little hole- an emotional sting. (Barthes 1980, p.27)

According to Barthes (1980, p.96) the concept of punctum is further complicated by the fact that aside from the primary one, there is a second source of punctum, or the *noeme* that carries the meaning of "that -has- been". It denotes a simple passage of time and thus connotates death. In that sense, every photograph already has that element of dying, or "about to die/already dead quality" even if the person in it is still alive (Olin 2002, p. 108). Therefore, a photograph has a memorial element, as it communicates between the past and the present. It relates to death even if the person in question is still alive (Olin 2002, p.101). As Barthes explains, this new punctum is time or emphasis on the *noeme*. By being given an absolute past, or aorist, the photograph denotes the imminent death in the future and there is an always present element of the defeat of time (Barthes 1980, p.96).

In addition to this, Barthes states that there is history which separates him from photography, as he could read his nonexistence in the clothes his mother had worn long before he could remember her (Barthes 1980, p.64). In that sense, photography has that power of our predecessor, and at the same time it outlives our simple existence. Thus, the life of someone whose existence has somewhat proceeded our own, encloses in its particularity the tension and division of history (Barthes 1980, p.65).

"Absence in this book about loss, is presence", therefore, punctum can be the absent detail, or the one a person wishes not to be there, as stated by Olin (2002, p.110).

All through the process of writing my PhD thesis, and while remembering the events from my childhood that were connected to what Yugoslavia once was to me, I was experiencing this overwhelming sensation of snow and associations to snow. I felt haunted by the mental images of snow, and this felt as though I was walking through the cold fields of Vojvodina, in present day Serbia, where I grew up. I remember those winters of my childhood and I can still feel how cold, foggy, and uncertain they were. In that sense, I could recognise the connection between my experiences and understanding of photography to that of Olin's, as obvious in the following quote:

"Photography is a winter garden, like a chamber Claire that lets in light in the winter and keeps alive artificially that which should otherwise have died" (Olin 2002, p.115).

As years went by, my overall experience of my childhood years and upbringing in Yugoslavia, and through the subsequent conflicts, had a connection to this memory of snow. Perhaps for me, snow had such importance because it was so contrary to the reality that was around us and it was peaceful, with a sense of resolution, not from conflict, but the sense of calm contrary to chaos of our lives. My memory of conflict and loss, on the other hand, were also connected to the memory of snow. Snow was always there in some way, in my memory, and in my associations of what Yugoslavia meant to me. At the same time, it is connected to my melancholy which is a consequence of the loss of my country and my deceased or displaced family members. I was trying to depict snow by placing various samples under a microscope and finally achieved my intention by using samples from the Yugoslav Monument of Revolution, in my hometown, Ruma, Serbia. The texture of samples taken from the monument's base under a microscope gave the effect of snow. For me, this marked the birth of my future microscope photography and these tiny fragments in microscope photographs that remind me of Yugoslavia, are my personal punctum.

Taking Barthes's and Olin's position, my aim is to use photography as punctum, as the issues of loss and dissolution of Yugoslavia caused my emotional wound, but also as stadium to present the Yugoslav historical era.

In that sense and as a result of practice- based photographic research and in the course of this research, four types of photographs were identified, created, and compiled, as a valuable means to visually investigate the testimony of the experience of Yugoslavia. Aside from microscope photographs, I created autoethnographic photographs of sites and objects associated with Yugoslavia, while family archival photography sourced from my personal family archive is also utilised in this research. In addition, during my research process, I have gathered a valuable archival photographic material from the Ruma County Museum archives in Serbia.

Therefore, photography, as a visual autoethnographic narrative, is in the core of this research and each photograph brings a contribution to preserve a memory of Yugoslavia and at the same time visually explores the complex issues of identity, loss and belonging.

2.4 Trauma

Parts of this text in bold have been published

In addition to presenting punctum and stadium in this research, I tried to test whether art creation helps to cope with trauma. Even though survivors are those who devise means of overcoming trauma in the form of personal narratives, documentary records and artistic expression, I want to investigate these claims and pose a question of how and whether practicing art improves chances of integration and transformation of traumatic experience by expressing inner unspeakable aspects, with the final goal of making sense and meaning in the trauma itself (Braga, Mello, and Fiks, 2012). One of the questions in this respect is whether art can help fight against anxiety, enhance both sense of self and sense of safety and at the same time help in building strength and resilience (Gerge and Pedersen 2017, p.58).

In addition, I want to question whether practicing art and to which extent, can help externalise my traumatic experiences. I want to believe so, for art creation allows me to express otherwise unspeakable experiences, memories, and emotions (Doherty and Eaton 2007).

Traumatisation represents a subsequent reaction to a past event which can be overwhelming and affect the victim's integrity. The way people deal with trauma also depends on the type of trauma experienced, as there are different varieties of trauma which can be caused by natural or

man-made factors, such as war and political violence which are massive in scale and repeated, while their consequences on survivors are extremely harsh (Giller 1999). The results can be devastating and can cause posttraumatic syndromes such as ASD, acute stress disorder or PTSD.

On the other hand, trauma in general has many adverse effects, not all being necessarily negative. It helps build resilience which is a crucial element for surviving. In this sense, trauma can be explained as an experience of a survivor. It can be defined as the process of using all available resources to adapt and survive stress (Lee 2012). Resilience can become an important characteristic because, on the broader level, it builds an individual's general sense of surviving, something that can be named traumatic intelligence. As a matter of fact, it builds a person's readiness to deal with future stress. In addition to this, it is argued that people with higher emotional intelligence respond better to traumatic experience (Hunt and Evans, 2004).

Quoting Hoggard (2009, p.35) "Resilience is the hottest new topic in psychology, medicine, and social sciences. Resilience is a critical skill. In a stressful, fast changing world, it can help inoculate against mental illness while boosting achievement level and productivity."

In relation to this, research was made into an attempt to distinguish artist and non-artist brain and a significant difference between the two was noticed. According to King (2016), a non-artist's brain needs more time to process trauma, also to work harder and to employ higher executive function in judgment and awareness, due to lack of experience in art creation.

In an article *Inhabited Studio*, Debra Kalimanowitz, researcher, and art therapist, explains how two women who were refugees from different countries, took part in an experiment which was focused on the use of art therapy as a response to political violence and trauma. One of the women described her experience after art therapy, saying that it helped her to challenge her belief about herself as a woman beyond repair. She also said that art helped her to express what she could not say in words, and it also helped her to see her thoughts outside of herself which offered relief (Kalimanowitz 2016). Artistic creation in this respect, helped in a way that it allowed distance from the traumatic event by using metaphors or symbols but also a possibility to present the inner world of thought and emotion. This is very important because, in some cases, alexithymia or the inability to describe one's emotions occurs as well. By expressing their own trauma through art, and developing a sense of self-awareness, victims of trauma can become mindful and in control of their emotions by recognising the moment of becoming overwhelmed and acting in order to prevent it (Kalimanowitz, 2016).

2.4.1 Memory and Trauma

Discussing about the value of a personal story, Ellis and Bochner (2006) emphasise the fact that, after experiencing disaster, humans think deeply about the values of life. Disaster is what keeps one in the present moment and immediacy of trauma causes someone to be mesmerised by images and emotion. In other words, trauma broadens our experience. The stories of people who have survived trauma are pure gifts of living testimony (Ellis and Bochner (2006, p. 430). For this very reason, autoethnography, aside from photographic practice-based research, proved to be the best-chosen methodology, as it allowed me to closely narrate my experiences of traumas related to the loss of my country, its values and the people close to me, while at the same time, this gift of my living testimony brings a unique contribution to knowledge and is a means of preserving memories of everything Yugoslavia once stood for and represented to the people around me and me personally.

At times it seems as if facing circumstances of loss and palpable suffering outgrows the possibility of simply defining autoethnography. Without a personal story, knowledge and theory become disembodied words. In this respect autoethnography is different from analytical ethnography. It involves

self (Ellis and Bochner 2006, p.431). Presenting a personal account on a serious and horrific topic such as the war I lived through, requires a research method which can offer deeper understanding of the lived experience. Autoethnography starts as a journey into subconscious and as an attempt to overcome traumatic events (Custer 2014, p.1).

What the people around me and I have in common, is exposure to the same circumstances which in our lives produced collective trauma. Collective trauma influences the way in which survivors perceive the world and their relationship within their group and with other groups. The long-term effects of collective trauma are even evident with second and third generations of survivors in the sense that their fundamental sense of security is undermined. On a personal level, higher rates of psychological distress are noted with these individuals, according to Yehuda et al. (see Hirschberger 2018). Quoting Lifton (see Hirschberger 2018), they "display heightened individual and collective fear, feelings of vulnerability, injured national pride, humiliation. Canetti et al. (see Hirschberger 2018) state that common to people who faced collective trauma is "a crisis of identity, and a predisposition to react with heightened vigilance to new threats, such that the pain of past generations is conflated with threats facing the current generation." However, the memory of trauma is important in the sense of meaning-making in suffering and the transgenerational collective promotes a sense of group importance and common destiny, thus promoting the construction of identity, re-establishing a sense of control and self/collective worth. This need to promote a positive image within a group can sometimes be achieved through devaluations of other groups, and through the reconstruction of reality and memory (Hirschberger 2018).

According to Benjamin (1955) "memory is the epic faculty par excellence" and only via comprehensible memory can epic writing make its peace with death and absorb the course of events and their passing. Memory in this sense, also creates a chain of tradition that allows a happening to pass from one generation to another (Benjamin 1955, p. 371).

This research originates from memory and thus the temporal aspect of my story is something I gave a lot of thought to. I felt that the events covered in this thesis do not follow a chronological pattern, but then I realised that I am more comfortable with such timeline of events, as memory is not linear, especially while dealing with traumatic experiences. The process of inscription of traumatic events into a linear narrative is arguable and even though it might at times seem necessary, it is not always possible. We cannot remember trauma simply by placing it within the space and time frames without neutralising it (Edkins 2003, p.15). To define my trauma, I needed to revisit and redefine the space and time in my memory over and over again. Here lies the importance of site-specificity. By previously revisiting the places invited by my memories within the narrative, via field trips to Serbia and Croatia, in particular my hometown Ruma, Serbia and using site writing to investigate these sites presented within the research, I gained the possibility to define both time and place and trauma associated to them. Revisiting these places allowed me to identify various historical periods and time frames which have marked some of these sites. Associations connected to them enabled me to trace the changes within sites through time, to recall the ghosts of the past and mark the changing functions of sites in which the narrative is positioned. The only meaningful solution to present traumatic memory was, therefore, to encircle the site of trauma, again and again. To exactly remember trauma would a priori make such documentation false as this would turn such memory into a neutral form deprived of subjectivity or simply put, into an objective experience (Zizek 2002, p. 272).

"The essence of the trauma is precisely that it is too horrible to be remembered, to be integrated into our symbolic universe. All we have to do is to mark repeatedly the trauma as such, in its very "impossibility", in its non-integrated horror, by means of some "empty" symbolic gesture" (Zizek 2002, p.272). From here originates this compulsion to encircle the site of the "Lost Thing", to make an attempt to mark what seems impossible to mark, to put a tombstone on the place and mark it as dead by making a living monument of trauma. This process is not simply an act of nostalgia and infatuation with the past. It is the possibility to integrate the past into the present (Zizek 2002, p.273).

While explicit memories are based on episodic knowledge and their aim is mainly to inform us, they do not affect daily activities and preferences. Unlike them, implicit memories emerge as an emotional response to an association, or a cue related to the context in which the traumatic experience occurred, and their retrieval is experienced as a current emotion with properties similar to the initial emotions. Memories such as these can influence the direct attention, behaviour and thinking and are immediately aimed at protecting a person and at avoiding danger (Sanna and Chang 2006, p. 285). Some therapeutic treatments of implicit memories suggest that they can be dealt with by re-experiencing them and in that way changing the way in which they are interpreted, thus framing them into a flexible narrative by integrating memories of trauma into someone's life story and the totality of a person's identity (Van der Hart, Brown and Van der Kolk, 1989, p.1).

Both memory and forgetting are essential in order to offer a political challenge by encircling trauma. Therefore, linear presentation of events as they are tackled by history cannot be justifiable to every case. Linear time and trauma time are not independent from each other, but they rather coexist and define each other. Some forms of memorising traumatic events would be better explained using the term not forgetting than remembering. Therefore, memory cannot always be identified and described using a linear narrative, and even though the language we use to describe it requires linearity, we need to search for alternative means of expression (Edkins 2003, p.15).

In addition to this, language has made it clear that memory is not an instrument for exploring the past, but rather a medium, and it is a medium of that which is experienced. According to Benjamin, those who want to explore their own buried past need to behave like the people digging. They should not be afraid to go back again to the same matter and scatter as one scatters earth and turn it over as one does with soil. The matter itself is a sort of strata which reveals its secrets only after a thorough investigation. Genuine memories should yield an image of the person who remembers, same as an archaeological report which does not only tell us about the strata from which its findings originate, but also discovers which strata first had to be broken through (Benjamin 1932, p. 576).

While discussing the relationship between history and memory, Nora (1989) claims that the two seem to be in fundamental opposition. Memory is life borne by living societies and it is subject to permanent evolution, thus including both remembering and forgetting, vulnerable to manipulation and appropriation, at times staying dormant and perpetually revived. History on the other hand is an incomplete reconstruction of what once was. Memory is an actual phenomenon tied to the present while history is nothing but a representation of the past. As such, it often calls for analysis and criticism (Nora 1989, p. 8).

Therefore, this research relies on memory, but at the same time deals with the treatment of memory as a source of research data. This is one of the challenges I am encountering with the use of autoethnography, given the extensive research on this methodology. It is understood within such frameworks of methodology that memory, is in this context, a variable category and it is my intention to pose a question of how in the course of time it reshapes, shifts, and takes changing forms within our minds. Relying on memory as the primary data resource while using autoethnography, leads to important questions of how knowledge in this form is difficult to validate within the research. This is one of the pitfalls of autoethnography as a research method that I am very mindful of, although, memory is closely related to our subjectivity which is so important to this piece of research and its contribution to new knowledge.

If for example, I am researching events dating back to 25 years in the past, as is the case with my research of the Yugoslav Civil war circumstances, how can I entirely trust myself to be a data source? In this respect, re-questioning the validity of my memory as an eleven-year-old child who

experienced war seems necessary. To support the personal narrative, additional data sources are required. This issue is addressed through the literature review and primarily through the practice-based photographic research.

The literature review focuses on specific interviews and artworks of artists who originate from the same social context surrounding Yugoslavia and those who deal with the similar issues of belonging, home, loss, and identity. These serve as a method to inform my practice and to test the validity of my memories presented through the visual and written narrative.

In that sense, field trips allowed identifying the properties of sites in which the research is positioned, while the literature review situates the research into context. Identifying the artworks of other artists from the same social context surrounding the Civil war in Yugoslavia, whose art practices address the issues of memory, loss, and identity, also enables me to test the truthfulness of my own narrative and position it against the multiple viewpoints and perspectives to contribute to the new knowledge in this respect.

Duncan (2004) suggests usage of more than one source of evidence and states that if they are multiple, they are more justifiable. In addition to this, autoethnography needs to be based on multiple evidence which can come from data collection and analysis, observation, fieldtrip notes, interviews and analysis of documents and artifacts. For these purposes I used a research journal with self-reflections, further supported by written reflections and sketches. For Duncan (2004), these notebooks served four purposes, to externalise assumptions and reactions to events or people, to capture an inner dialogue, to externalise the inner dialogue through creative processes and to record changes in understanding of concepts. After the period of writing, the researcher is engaged in analysis focused on more detailed reflection (Duncan 2004, p.33).

These notebooks in the form of research journal, are an element of methodology within this research as well and they were developed throughout the research process. They served as a starting point of reflection and were revisited and consulted during the research process They include results of literature examination, notes on visits to sites and exhibitions, visual and other documentation. Initial thoughts, reflections on literature, initial ideas for pieces of narrative, narratives written on the back of receipts, visual parts of research and memories are compiled within research journals.

According to Mayan, Morse & Richards (see Wall 2008, p.44), the autoethnographic data can be gathered via field trips and notes, interviews, news articles, artworks of other artists, research diaries, photographs, and document analysis. In this research these elements are further combined with personal testimony memories. However, according to Wall (2008, p.45) if another researcher interviews us, how would this research result be more justified when/if it still relies on our own memory. Sometimes we simply need to employ willing suspension of disbelief in order to ask questions, open the discussions and set the platform for the dialogue within the research.

In addition to this, researching the idea of collective memory proved to be valuable and helped me frame my personal narrative based on memories. Individual memory is inserted in the cultural context and in that sense some of our memories are also collective as they originate from it. Two notions are relatable to the idea of social memory during the twentieth century. There was an attempt to conceive collective memory as biological or racial memory. However, Halbwach (see Assmann and Czaplick 1995, p.145), shift collective knowledge into a cultural one, thus explaining that collective knowledge and the sense of belonging are not transferred by evolution but rather through customs and socialisation.

In the case of humans, cultural memory is a way of survival, opposite to animals the survival of which is maintained through genetic programs. In that

sense, cultural memory is a collective concept for all knowledge that directs behaviour and experience within the society framework (Assmann and Czaplick 1995, p.126).

The concept of 'communicative memory' includes all the varieties of collective memory which are based on everyday communication (Assmann and Czaplick 1995, p.126). Halbwachs (see Assmann and Czaplick 1995, p.126) claims that these varieties constitute the field of oral history. Through communication, individuals compose a memory which is socially meditated and relates to a group (Assmann and Czaplick 1995, p.126). In that sense, every individual memory constitutes itself through communication with others, or groups who have a common image of their past. Halbwachs here mentions families, neighbourhood, political parties, associations and even nations, and belonging to these various groups helps in the formation of self-image. However, the horizon of oral history does not extend for longer than three or four consecutive generations (Latin saeculum) which is equivalent to eighty to one hundred years in the past. Once living communication turned into an objectivised culture, in texts, buildings, cities etc. the group relationship is lost and with it also the concept of collective memory which at this point turns into history (Assmann and Czaplick 1995, p.126).

The concept of cultural memory comprises of that body of reusable texts, images, rituals which are specific to each society or epoch, and these serve to covey the society's self-image. Upon this collective knowledge each group becomes aware of its unity and particularity, at least in most cases, but not exclusively (Assmann and Czaplick 1995, p.132).

3. RESEARCH CONTEXT

3.1 Origins of Research

The context of this research originates from the direct consequence of living in the communist regime of Yugoslavia and its subsequent clash and exposure to war. There were two groups of people surrounding me at a time around the dissolution of Yugoslavia: those who were thought to be obedient during Tito's rule and those who were thinkers and had deeper understanding of their surroundings. Unlike the people who silently accepted reality, my parents were the so-called 'Whistle-blowers' who went out into the streets in demonstrations against the rule of Slobodan Milosevic, the president of what Yugoslavia then was, after the dissolution when it consisted only of Serbia and Montenegro, until Montenegro left in 2006. Milosevic's rule and his war-oriented nationalist politics directly led to conflict and the downfall of the country which further on resulted in sanctions, inflation, and the total rip-off of ordinary people. My parents were those ordinary people, intellectuals who understood how relevant the change was and they marched and marched against the system. That they would march for their right to a better life, for the end to war and political moves of Slobodan Milosevic, was the last thing they could imagine as their future during Yugoslavia. Similar to the Yurchak's viewpoint in relation to the collapse of the Soviet system, they also had the experience of the profound feeling of the system's permanence and immutability and were not ready for the collapse (Yurchak 2005, p.1). The same paradoxes within these two systems could be noted, as they both produced suffering, repression, and lack of freedom. but at the same time for the great number of citizens, the values of the communist system were deeply integrated into their lives and these fundamental values, ideals, and ideas such as altruism, equality, education, work, friendship were of genuine importance (Yurchak 2005, p.8). For many people socialism in the Soviet Union, as a system of human values, was not necessarily equivalent to state ideology and this is where the "post-Soviet nostalgia" originates from (Yurchak 2005, p.8). It is a longing for the tactual humane values, comradeship, ethics, equality and belonging. There is a true parallel to this description of the Soviet socialism to the values nurtured by my parents in Yugoslavia and in this respect the Yugonostalgia is very relatable to the Soviet one.

Two types of nostalgia characterise the relationship to the past, to home and one's own self- perception- reflective and restorative. Restorative puts emphasis on rebuilding the lost home and characterises national and nationalist revivals and patching the memory gaps, as was seen after the break-up of Yugoslavia and the revival of its nation states. Reflective nostalgia dwells in loss and longing, it lingers on ruins, in the dreams of another place and time. Therefore, longing is shared by human beings, but the ways in which belonging, and nonbelonging are perceived and narrated defer (Boym 2002, p.41).

Therefore, understanding this paradox is also a way to depict what Yugoslav society was in my lived experience, and this research also offers an image of Yugoslavia, contrary to the prevailing narrative and the assumptions that follow some of the understandings behind Yugoslav communism. Alike the problematic assumptions about Soviet socialism, implicitly and explicitly used in academic writing and journalism, the image of Yugoslav society is in certain aspects packed with such assumptions and binary terminologies that describe it. Such terminologies have occupied a dominant position in the West (Yurchak 2005, p.5). Focusing on only such, one-sided accounts does not bring justice to the internal paradoxes of life during Soviet socialism, nor does it explain the realities of ordinary citizens, many of whom have deeply cherished the ideals and values of the system (Yurchak 2005, p.8). In this respect, I see a great similarity to the story of Yugoslavia.

Quoting Yurchak (2005, p.9):

"Without understanding the ethical and aesthetic paradoxes that "really existing socialism" acquired in the lives of many of its citizens, and without understanding the creative and positive meanings with which they endowed their socialist lives—sometimes in line with the announced goals of the

state, sometimes in spite of them, and sometimes relating to them in ways that did not fit either-or dichotomies—we would fail to understand what kind of social system socialism was and why its sudden transformation was so unimaginable and yet unsurprising to the people living within it. For the analysis of this seemingly paradoxical mix of the negative and positive values, of alienations and attachments, we need a language that does not reduce the description of socialist reality to dichotomies of the official and the unofficial, the state and the people, and to moral judgments shaped within cold war ideologies".

In the same respect and while taking into consideration narrative discourses of artistic testimonies, it became evident that various, sometimes contradictory narratives of memory were created, and these also determined the relationship of witnesses towards NATO bombing of Serbia in 1999. With that in mind, many authors belonged to different identities, ethnical and national (for example Serbs and Albanians from Kosovo). NATO bombing represented a twist in Serbian history, and it preceded the 5th of October Revolution in Serbia and the overthrow of Slobodan Milosevic, the Serbian president at a time, but it also coincided with the period of transition of several ex-Yugoslav states into European Union, excluding Serbia in this respect. On the other hand, there were dilemmas regarding the moral justification of bombing as a peace mission and all those events led to the creation of various perspectives and contradictory aspects of memory (Mihaljinac 2016, p.9). Such narratives regarding the NATO bombing are factual, and their reference is in the real world, and in that respect artwork on bombing can serve as a relevant historical source (Mihaljinac 2016, p.61).

Theorists such as LaCapra have discussed the authenticity of survivors' testimonies and in his viewpoint these testimonies serve as a supplement to more standard documentary sources in history. Even though historians might doubt their reliability, as they are not always founded on facts, their importance is in the attempt to understand experience, the role of memory and its lapses, but also ways to deal with traumatic past (LaCapra 2001, p.86).

3.2 Art as a Response to War- Literature Review of Artists and Art Works

My parents were not the only ones to teach me to requestion our reality after the dissolution of Yugoslavia. Having had access to and understanding of works of other artists after my extensive courses in history of art during my BA and MA studies at the Academy of Arts in Novi Sad, and after the field trips we took as students to Venice Biennale, those experiences shaped my way of thinking and my further interest into art research.

In the years that followed the dissolution, when the borders opened again, I had the opportunity to travel to Venice Biennale in Italy, first as an art student and then on my own, on more than one occasion, and that place was crucial for the birth of my PhD research. I got to see the artists whose work was based on the issues surrounding what Yugoslavia once was, but also on broader concepts related to wider geographical areas and burning topics of crises around the world. Those artworks were a direct response to war, displacement, and dissolution, and they openly questioned the issues of belonging, fragmentation, memory, patriarchy, loss, and identity. They completely opened my eyes to a new understanding of what had happened to us in Yugoslavia, but also to how art can really be reactionary and help break through patterns of politics and war. What I saw then and there left a huge mark on me, not only for the message these works conveyed, but also for showing me how to think differently. The artworks displayed at The Venice Biennale depicted global social and political state of affairs. Since contemporary artists work in a constantly changing world which is advancing technically, but is shaken by the instabilities, in terms of wars and crises, their task is arduous.

In that sense, the literature review, discussions, and interviews resulting from field trips, completed during my PhD research, had an important role of identifying, analysing, documenting, and exploring the impact of artworks of other artists which originate from ex-Yugoslav social contexts and deal with similar issues, in order to inform my art practice and test the quality of my own memories and claims.

Interviews with artists who participated at the *Feminist Art Colony* in Sicevo, Serbia. were crucial as they allowed a deeper understanding of shared experiences related to ex-Yugoslav social context. Artworks of these artists are based on the presentation of conflict and the quest for identity after the dissolution. Emotions were also in their core and even though my knowledge of using art in autoethnographic research back then was limited, I identified it in their work. These interviews had an important role of identifying, analysing, documenting, and exploring the impact of artworks of other artists which originate from ex-Yugoslav social contexts and deal with the similar issues of belonging, home, loss, and identity. These serve as a method to inform my practice and to test the validity of my memories presented through the visual and written narrative.

These interviews were also valuable because they offered understanding of how being Yugoslav based, also influenced development of identities of artists. Some of their artworks serve to empower women, while feminist ideas in them also result from exposure to war, struggle and hardship. Therefore, they deal with trauma, aside from sensitive issues, but also with healing process of art as a means of support.

The interview with Serbian artist Rasa Todosijevic was crucial because it helped to get familiar with the art scene in ex-Yugoslavia. Rasa Todosijevic was at the forefront of its development until war put the stop to it and brought the overall destruction and clash of cultural values. This eventually led to the closure of the Belgrade Museum of Contemporary art which was in Todosijevic's words built for a different time.

The literature review provides a substantial amount of supportive material, and it enables me to test my own memory by allowing a close comparison to other researchers' experiences and other artists' artworks on the topics relevant to this research. The works of artists exhibiting at Venice Biennale Serbian Pavilion, such as Djordje Ozbolt who investigates the complex issues of memory of a disappearing cultural heritage of a Yugoslav époque, through the installation named *Regaining memory loss* and Milena Dragicevic, who as an immigrant from Yugoslavia, negotiates belonging and identity in her painting installation *Transatlantica* alongside performance artwork of Marina Abramovic *The Balkan Baroque*, which addresses the issues of ethnic cleansing surrounding the Yugoslav Civil war and Tanja Ostojic's performance *Personal Space*, in which she gave her response to the chaos of Serbian life in the nineties, remain an integral part of the thesis, because of their relevance for identifying issues set by my research question. In addition to this, the pavilion of Serbia is an example within the debate surrounding the nation-based system of Venice Biennale, thus tracing back to the very notion of belonging, considering that the exhibition space of today's Serbian Pavilion in Venice is in a building that still has Yugoslavia written on it on the façade (Gvero 2017).

A good example in this respect is Grubanov's installation *United Dead Nations* at the 56th Venice Bienalle, in which he represented Serbia. Featuring the flags of countries and republics which no longer exist, or stopped existing during the biennial's run, Grubanov poses the very question of nationhood and belonging (Gvero 2017).



Figure 7: Ivan Grubanov, "United Dead Nations", installation, Happening.media, 2015, *The Death of a Nation The Serbian Pavilion in Venice, United Dead Nations*, (installation), photograph, Serbian Pavilion, Venice Biennale, (online), Available at: https://www.happening.media/category/magazine/en/articles/2930/the-death-of-anation-the-serbian-pavilion-in-venice, (Accessed 24th April 2020)

Similarly, and requestioning the idea of nationhood, Zoran Todorovic represented Serbia at the 53rd Venice Biennale in 2009 with his artwork *Warmth* which consisted of three tons of human hair collected from 288.000 individuals arranged in such a way that some were made into rugs and blankets for sale (Potter, 2010). The project involved systematic stockpiling of human hair in hairdressing saloons, but also army barracks where haircutting is a form of control and discipline associated with the state apparatus. At the same time all these samples of hair woven into blankets also represent a form of a Serbian DNA map which requestions the notion of national representation of Serbia (Dimitrijevic 2009).

According to Milena Dragicevic, Serbian artist, the civil war in Yugoslavia acted as a catalyst for re-examining the questions of identity because only when we live to experience our identity shaken to the core, we start to "negotiate different realities" (Phaidon 2011).

After the break-up of Yugoslavia and the formation of new states, one of which is Serbia, most artists who represent Serbia at Venice Biennale, have been struggling to negotiate the ways to define their national identity, and this is evident in their artworks (Gvero,2017). Milena Dragicevic defines herself as an immigrant searching to locate "a space of multiplicity where art can happen." In other words, she is searching for somewhere to express herself, as for many artists from Serbia, this place is of a transitory nature.

"I look for a space without borders, a space with blurred edges, a space of inside out, a space that is wet and dry, a space where I can leak colour and where I can leak form" (Gvero 2017).

This indefinite nature of "somewhere" points out to the necessity to re-question a building as a space of representation of national identity, as was the case in representing art in Venice Biennale pavilions. Representing a fixed national identity using any structure whether physical or abstract, is becoming less and less favourable. The Serbian pavilion in the building, which is still named Yugoslavia, is true evidence of this fact. In relation to this, the theme of the 57th group exhibition, (Milena Dragicevic, alongside Vladislav Scepanovic and Dragan Zdravkovic) at Biennale's Serbian pavilion is "Enclavia" and it refers to two poles- Western and Eastern world in which Serbia and Serbian artists are caught, with Biennale representing a space where these two poles meet. This is the theme of Dragicevic's paintings "Erections for Transatlantica" and these paintings explore the divide between two worlds separated by the Atlantic Ocean (Gvero 2017).

"Due to my nomadic existence this suspended space is a place I have come to inhabit on a regular basis. It is a space that holds both a utopian promise as well as the fear of an impending abyss" (Martinjanda.ad 2011).

The expression Transatlantica alludes to a fictional place of origin or a place in-between which also refers to Milena's identity since she is a Serbian who grew up in Canada and now lives in the UK. In Dragicevic's words Transatlantica is a: "space of becoming, transformation, and exposure, (...) and a space of envelopment and of erasure" (Gvero 2017).



Figure 8: Milena Dragicevic, "Transatlantica", (paintings), Happening.media, 2017, *The Death of a Nation The Serbian Pavilion in Venice Transatlantica*, (paintings), 2 photographs, Serbian Pavilion *Enclavia*, Venice Biennale, (online), Available at: https://www.happening.media/category/magazine/en/articles/2930/the-death-of-anation-the-serbian-pavilion-in-venice, (Accessed 24th April 2020)

Research into loss in this context, can be further extended and closely related to the idea of memory loss, which also points out to the fact that memory is a feature which cannot always be relied on. For example, the approach to this topic was offered by Djordje Ozbolt whose installations at the Serbian pavilion in the Venice Biennale comprised of paintings and sculptures. The concept behind the exhibition deals with the complex issues of memory of a disappearing cultural heritage of a Yugoslav époque through an installation named 'Regaining memory loss', (Belgradedesignweek 2019). Ozbolt, who grew up in Yugoslavia, was interested in how memories unfold with the passing of time and being exposed to constant changes, become an unreliable category. He was exploring both oblivion and quality of memory in terms of what we remember, individually or collectively and what we forget (Interviewmagazine 2019).



Figure 9: Djordje Ozbolt, "Regaining Memory Loss", (installation), Heralds, 2019, *Djordje Ozbolt, Regaining Memory Loss*, (installation), Serbian Pavilion, Venice Biennale, (online), Available at: http://www.heraldst.com/djordje-ozbolt, (Accessed 4th April 2020)

Rasa Todosijevic with his artwork Light and Darkness of Symbols, represented Serbia at the 54th Biennale. Through a series of installations od swastika, he argues the shift of meanings of symbols depending on the historical context (Enrico 2011).



Figure 10: Rasa Todosijevic, "Light and Darkness of Symbols", installation, Modernism, Rasa Todosijevic, Light and Darkness of Symbols, Venice Biennale 2011, a still from Rasa's famous performance Was Ist Kunst? featuring Rasa's wife and artist Mariela Kozelj. Tate gallery in London bought the rights to show this performance in 2014, Available at: https://www.modernism.ro/2011/08/09/rasa-todosijevic-light-and-darkness-of-symbols-serbia-pavilion-the-54th-international-art-exhibition-of-the-venice-biennale/, (Accessed 10th of November 2020)



Figure 11: Rasa Todosijevic, "Light and Darkness of Symbols", installation, Modernism, *Rasa Todosijevic*, *Light and Darkness of Symbols*, Venice Biennale 2011, Available at: https://www.modernism.ro/2011/08/09/rasa-todosijevic-light-and-darkness-of-symbols-serbia-pavilion-the-54th-international-art-exhibition-of-the-venice-biennale/, (Accessed 10th of November 2020)

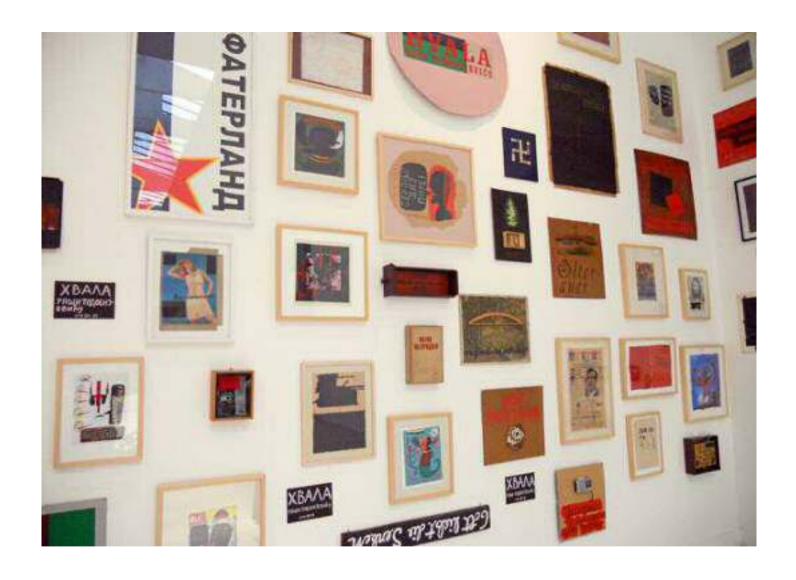


Figure 12: Rasa Todosijevic, "Light and Darkness of Symbols", installation, Modernism, Rasa Todosijevic, Light and Darkness of Symbols, Venice Biennale 2011, Available at: https://www.modernism.ro/2011/08/09/rasa-todosijevic-light-and-darkness-of-symbols-serbia-pavilion-the-54th-international-art-exhibition-of-the-venice-biennale/, (Accessed 10th of November 2020)

Aside from the aforementioned, some other artists from a broader geographical area also presented artworks related to the issues of nationhood, displacement, memory and belonging, and these artworks also informed this research due to the relevance of the topics they addressed.

During the collapse of socialism and the breakup of Yugoslavia, a group of artists decided to create a utopian state called NSK Neue Slowenische Kunst (a German phrase meaning "New Slovenian Art") to reconsider what a modern globalised nation would look like. 25 years later they made a national pavilion at Venice Biennale and handed out passports to everyone willing to become a citizen. At the same time, at the Tunisian pavilion, artists decided to advance from the traditional art exhibition by issuing "freesas"- documents for an idyllic world in which citizens could move freely from one nation to another. In both artworks the response to refugee crises, as well as the rise of populist nationalism in Europe, are obviously portrayed. (Ellis-Petersen, 2017)

In the artwork shown at the 56th Biennale at the Japanese pavilion, artist Chiharu Shiota pointed out to individual memories as one of the most fragile elements of every human being. By collecting 180.000 keys which belonged to various people all over the world and connecting them using red yarn into a huge installation over two boats, she devised a unique way to retain memories of her loved ones and thus deal with their death. The artwork pointed out to a universal feature common to all people, fluctuation, and frailty of memories, but also necessity to deal with loss.

Sislej Xhafa, an artist from Kosovo in his installation "Lost and Found" commemorates the people missing after the Kosovo War. The installation at the Venice Biennale in 2017 consisted only of a telephone booth made of palettes with a lost and found sign and a telephone which never rings, to refer to the families waiting to hear the news about their missing relative. His artwork tackles global societal issues marked by the uncertainty of future and restrictions of personal freedom (Theveniceinsider 2017).

The research was also informed by practices of artist who originate from the social context of ex-Yugoslavia but were not necessarily present at Venice Biennale such as Balint Szombathy, who in his artwork Flags II, 1995, presented his distress at the ethnically motivated violence and the loss of unity which existed during Yugoslavia. He draws upon the Christian iconography and in his performance enacts violent suffering to creatively distil recent historical events for his audience who might have had first-hand experience of the break-up of Yugoslavia as a socialist amalgamation of many religions, cultural traditions and ethnic groups (Richards 2008).

3.3 Photographic Theory and History

Considering that during the research process, I aimed my practice primarily towards photography, this research is also informed by wider examples of photographic practice through readings into photographic theory and history. This knowledge has helped towards making an appropriate choice of photographic medium, type and the shape photographic practice has taken in this respect.

While discussing the function of media, Ruchatz (see Eril, Nünning 2008) points out to the fact that storage media have been equated with the functions of memory, and thus the invention of photography led to the fact that human memory became a sort of a photographic plate ready to record visual experience. However, the capacity of media to store natural memory has often been brought to question (Eril, Nünning 2008, p.368) and photography is therefore, better referred to as a trace. Manual modes of representation have a storage capacity, but photographic memory retains even the apparently insignificant. If seen as a trace, photographic medium can be seen as evidence. When a photograph refers to the past, it rather triggers remembering than memory itself, and as traces are generated unintentionally, they can be seen as authentic testimonies of the past (Eril, Nünning 2008, p.370).

According to Baer (2002) "photographs can capture the shrapnel of traumatic time." This statement is in the direct opposition to our understanding of time as linear and it rather confronts us with the possibility that time consists of singular bursts and explosions. The very truth about photography is that it does not only carry meaning, but it represents testimony in time (Baer 2002, p.7). However, the representation of trauma comes to the forefront, for even though camera captures the events that create bursts and explosions, it is the lived experience that is suggested behind every photograph. Enigma of trauma cannot be explained only by a single event that causes it, but trauma should be rather seen as a disorder of memory and time (Baer 2002, p.8).

While discussing the issue of historical presentation of Holocaust in photography, Baer (2002) reflects on the number of news photographs taken by Western Allies in 1945, after the liberation of camps in Austria and Germany. Even though their purpose is to commemorate, precisely for this fact, these photographs lead to the disappearance of memory and represent past purely as an archive instead of presenting intangible presence of an absence. The graphic images of death are more likely to disable the viewers ability to respond critically of emphatically. As they represent something very finite, they correspond to the history locked in the past (Baer 2002, p.70). In opposition to this, sometimes simply showing a landscape, as is the case with Reinartz and Levin, who present the enormity of the representation of Holocaust within the genre of landscape photography, (Baer 2002, p.68) triggers a stronger response simply by showing nothing. This raises an important question about the difficulty of representing trauma and the poetics of witnessing (Baer 2002, p.70).

The above theoretical concepts on the historical representation through photography, made me question the impact of archival photography and made me think deeper about ways of representing trauma and personal testimony, and it crystallised my understanding of the fact that archival photography and my family photography might not be enough to present the issues outlined in the research question. To present loss and trauma, I had to investigate the photographic medium deeper and the result of this was microscope photography, which in my opinion triggers a response similar to the aforementioned landscape that presents Holocaust.

In the similar sense, English photographer Richard Billingham and Canadian photographer and filmmaker Jaret Belliveau produce unconventional photographs to investigate family dynamics. The artists are part of a broader movement in contemporary art photography aimed at representing

everyday lived experience that include candid documentation of tragedy and loss (Smith 2014, p.1) and their work thus corresponds to issues presented in this research. By making their private lives a public display, through art exhibitions and book publications, Billingham and Belliveau use family trauma as a meaningful source of subject matter. In this regard, these artists are in the contradictory position that many autobiographical photographers encounter; they reexperience trauma while recording the traumatic experiences (Smith 2014, p.1).

Billingham and Belliveau's work also allows audiences to conceptualise how trauma- related art operates through affect. The term affect is derived from the Latin affectus or adfectus, which, roughly translated to English, means passion or emotion. Their work allows audiences to reflect upon the possibilities, limitations, and ethics of framing family trauma as art photography. Affective responses to artwork representing trauma, can offer new ways of bridging cultural differences that may limit our understanding of each other. Thus, artwork that engages affect connects individuals and groups while producing new social relationships (Smith 2014, p.3).

In a similar sense, photographs, and a comic *Door*, by Serbian artist Danijel Savovic, serve as a visual testimony to present artist's response to traumas he survived during the military training in Urosevac, Kosovo, during the conflict surrounding the Kosovo war. In addition to this, Savovic belongs to the generation of artists who grew up in the Yugoslavia nineties and lived through the war, sanctions, and isolation. His artwork serves as a counterbalance to these dramatic circumstances but also rejects norms and mainstream cultural values (Artbrut 2023).

Likewise, Ivan Petrovic, a photographer, collector, and a researcher, has been creating and publishing photographs which depict a point in time and space and reflect their spirit, while in his works he uses both documentary and research approaches (Membrana 2017). For several years, he has been documenting situations in his immediate surrounding. His photographic work is autoethnographic and represents an extensive archive of artist's life. Through photography, in his auto-curatorial *Documents* project, he depicted the circumstances surrounding his life in Serbia and his presence in Kosovo as a soldier during the NATO bombing of Serbia in 1999. His photographic practice deals with the differentiation between collective history and intimate memory, but also raises questions about the phenomenon of the archive, photographic truth, and photography as testimony (Aftermathsee 2014).

In addition, his work was presented as a part of the project *Aftermath*, which gathered different artists from various ex- Yugoslav countries with the intention of presenting a metaphor for the consequences of turbulent events on their lives, either in the bloody war in Yugoslavia after the year 1990, or in the years that followed, and which brought new social values. Aftermath gathered various generations of artists who experienced life before disintegration and those born after it. *Aftermath* represents a metaphor for the consequences of turbulent events and the mark they left on the physical environment and on everyday social life. Through their creative efforts, the participating artists addressed various effects of transition processes that unconditionally and brutally changed the lives of individuals, be it the bloody wars in the 1990s and their indirect and direct consequences and radical economic changes. These changes had a significant impact on the general climate, or directly influenced the birth of new social values. Therefore, the main starting point of their creative work, is the relationship between the new and the old and the influence of different, changing ideologies on individual life and broader social and physical environment. Period covering twenty years is short enough to preserve historical memory therefore, for most artists, the new situation is always in a way juxtaposed with the memory of the recent past (Aftermathsee 2014).

In the initial stages of this research, it was my belief that the complexity of issues outlined in the research question requires multidisciplinary approach in terms of practice. Inspired by the power of installations which I encountered at Venice Biennale, I attempted to use an installation as an iterative medium. However, in the course of the research processes and informed by art practice of photographers such as Savovic and Petrovic, theoretical

concepts by Baer and Barthes, and inspired by the strength of the visual narrative I found in archival material, and the emotional resonance of my family photographs which I learnt to observe in the new light after reading Barthes, I made a decision to focus my art practice primarily on photography. Rather that exploring multiple approaches in order to present my chosen subject matter and to use these multiple disciplines only on the surface level, I decided to focus on how deep it is possible to dive within a single artistic discipline and present the issues of identity, loss and belonging in their core, including the elements invisible to the human eye. The contribution here lies in presenting the invisible and enable presence to the seemingly absent, to test the boundaries of our senses and use photography to tell a story of otherwise unspeakable aspects, such as human fears, sadness due to loss, love, need to belong and feel safe, but also understanding of the absence and/or presence of fulfilment of these needs. It was this challenge to present memories and emotions, but also my quest for belonging and my search for identity, that gave shape to the art practice featured in this respect.

My intention is to further pursue research into using autoethnography in artistic research, with the focus on identifying the otherwise invisible elements of autoethnographic experience, as was achieved with the representation of emotions through the usage of a microscope in this PhD research. I would like to extend the usage of microscope as a medium to express otherwise unspeakable elements of human experience, such emotions but also memory and see how this medium can be further extended and utilised in this sense.

4. METHODOLOGY

4.1 Photographic Practice-based Research

Autoethnography represents a mix of artistic representation, scientific inquiry, self-narration, and ethnography (Chang, Ngunjiri and Hernandez 2010, p.3). According to Custer (2014, p.6), autoethnography as a method is "an artistic tool of deep inquiry" and art serves as a means to convey life. Autoethnography is a creative process which focuses on a unique individual story and promotes creativity and imagination in readers. "Creativity and innovation that inspire change, transformation, and revolution offer multiple ways of seeing the world" (Custer 2014, p.6). Being a highly personal approach, autoethnography honours subjectivity, fosters empathy and embodies creativity (Custer 2014, p.9).

In that sense, this research employs creativity through practice which, alongside the parts of autoethnographic narrative, generates an interwoven polyphonic whole.

This practice-based research focuses on practice to implement experiential knowledge which conventional written and spoken communication lacks means to covey (Niedderer 2007, p.2). Throughout the chapters in the written thesis, the usage of practice is reflected in photography as an iterative research methodology which addresses the questions, aims and objectives set out in the research of complex issues of war, loss, identity and belonging, originating from the social context of ex- Yugoslavia.

Claims of originality and contribution to knowledge of this research are demonstrated through storytelling, and additionally through the outcome of creative practice, and are evident in both the narrative and practice-based research, while the innovation is embodied in the actual photographic practice-based artwork (Candy and Edmonds 2018, p.3).

The photographic art practice also addresses personal traumas and emotions resulting from the exposure to loss and war and these are exteriorised with the intention of making a statement (Grey and Mallins 1993, p.7). Therefore, the purpose of photographs included within the parts of the narrative, is to serve as a medium to enable witnessing and testify on behalf of my personal experience in order to illustrate facets of cultural experience (Ellis and Bochner 2011, p.4).

Autoethnographic photographs of objects or sites associated to Yugoslavia were created in the course of the research process. They also have a representation in the written narrative and these sites and objects were, in some cases, also the starting points of the use of microscope photography which results from my photographic practice-based exploration. The connection between what we can and cannot see, presented through these tiny samples in microscope image is so easily overlooked in our everyday lives. We cannot see our emotions and for me, the challenge was to visually present the emotional atmosphere of war and loss. In that sense, through the microscope photographs, I portrayed the sensation of my inner response to war and conflict that marked my childhood during and after Yugoslavia in the first 20 years of my life. In that sense, these photographs make the reader familiar with my personal understanding of the issues of loss, identity and belonging through the visual photographic narrative.

Therefore, these microscope photographs have elements of site-specificity as they are directly derived and originate from sites touched upon in the written narrative. According to Barthes (1980, p. 27) the interest in photography comes from "sentimental" reasons, as it can be observed not only as a question or a theme but as a "wound" thus allowing us to see, feel, notice, observe and think. In that sense, physical samples from my chosen sites

were gathered and placed under a microscope for the purpose of presenting both the aesthetic and emotional response to my experiences of loss, identity and belonging. Aside from using samples retrieved from sites, samples from objects used during Yugoslavia were also used for the creation of microscope photographs. These material objects, such as my pioneer scarf, my grandmother's apron, or my grandfather's work uniform, are reminders of what once was our life in Yugoslavia, and as such, they also bring an emotional element to this research.

As Benjamin (1931) states, photography is concerned with so called optical unconscious, which is discovered similarly to instinctual unconscious in psychoanalysis. It focuses on elements such as details of structure, cellular tissue: elements which technology or medicine are more concerned with. In its origin, they are even more native to the camera than a landscape or a portrait and photography reveals, through this material physiognomic aspects, image worlds unknown to the human eye which enlarged, "make a difference between technology and magic visible" (Benjamin 1931, p.512).

These valuable insights informed my decision to use microscope photography. In addition, microscope photographs also possess a unique aesthetic quality, artistic value and a certain kind of beauty which lures the viewer to engage in the act of looking. At the same time, these photographs provide an interruption from the heavy narrative and allow a distraction from the burden of the narrated experiences of war, loss, and decay. As they correspond with the idea of emotion becoming visible, they provide the viewer with the informed hidden aspects of human experience. In that sense, they reveal otherwise invisible phenomena and provide an additional information on them, thus depicting the world unknown to the human eye. They thus convey a new knowledge in both aesthetic and practice-based sense.

Aside from providing visual evidence, and disclosing otherwise invisible, microscope photographs question the emotional subjective/objective relationship but also reveal symbolic meanings. Even though possessing aesthetic quality, some of them also convey a sort of a sinister aggression with elements that symbolically resemble blood as a reference to conflict or a barbwire which intercepts and creates a barrier. It is this emotional response to loss, through my memories of what Yugoslavia once was, that I managed to depict using microscope photography.

Similarly, the photographs of the pioneer scarf under a microscope, present this emotional connection to my understanding of what the sense of belonging was supposed to be in my life, regardless of the future events and my subsequent realisation of the frailty of the notion of belonging. To me, red as a colour, aside from symbolising communism, symbolises my inner sense of belonging and through this raw red colour of the pioneer scarf, amplified under a microscope, I can identify my understanding of belonging.

In the same sense, the images, taken from the archival collection of Ruma County Museum, of the displaced women forced to leave their homes in Croatia during the Yugoslav Civil war - exiled in their old age, have a symbolic meaning. Their aprons remind me of my own childhood, and I have always seen such aprons as symbols of home. As my grandmother raised me and took care of me when I was a child, for me personally, an apron has always represented a symbol of safety. It seemed so contradictory to my experiences before war, to see those women in exile, wearing such similar aprons and scarves to those that my grandmother used to wear. In this way the image of an apron for me has a strong emotional resonance.

As Olin (2002) drawing on Barthes (1980) explains this, one photograph can be a source of identification with personal attributes, and what is touching in a photograph of someone else's family can be wounding in one's own (Olin 2002, p.107), thus a banal photograph can inflict a wound. She further explains punctum in this sense, and states that it may be forgotten, may be in the composition of or even be a different photograph. In this fact, we can observe an example which illuminates a relevant aspect of memory. Punctum can even be absent, but still existent, only in a different photograph. It is not just a memory of a person or an incident that a punctum reminds a person of, but also a memory of the photograph which can enact this displacement.

Both the pioneer scarf and the apron convey the sense of dreariness. This is especially evident in one of the microscope photographs of the pioneer scarf with a texture which seems as though it was soaked in blood. For me, they are symbolic on many levels as, on one hand, a scarf and an apron are the symbols of home and belonging in my own memory and on the other hand, there is this complete clash, dissolution, and disappearance of their initial meanings and of what they used to represent. Furthermore, through the photographic practice, I experienced the displacement of meaning of these symbols and the loss of their essence. I tried to convey these multiple meanings through microscope photography.

Other samples I placed under a microscope also had significance to my own childhood, such as the photographs of glass wool which we used in my family house for insulation and again this was the symbol of warmth and safety. On the other hand, 30 years after the complete dissolution, I get to see these sheets of glass wool hanging from the ceiling of what used to be a bus station during Yugoslavia in my town. Once again, what used to matter once, suddenly lost every significance.

Microscope photographs are presented in the following ways within the body of text as a collage: in a triptych, which includes the original photograph of a place from which the samples originate, to point out to the relevance of site-specificity, and they would resemble altar pieces which provide a narrative; in a sequence on a single page in one or two rows, and finally as single photographs spread out over one or two pages.

4.2 Storytelling and History

The act of writing about what once has been, resembles Benjamin's idea about *Angus Novus*, or the Angel of history, depicted in a painting by Klee. The Angel whose face is half turned to the past is trying to reach out and help those whose lives vanished, for what we see as a chain of events, he sees as a single catastrophe (Benjamin 1974, p. 6):

"He would like to pause for a moment, to awaken the dead, and to piece together what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing from Paradise, it has caught itself in his wings and is so strong that the Angel can no longer close them. The storm drives him irresistibly into the future to which his back is turned, while the rubble-heap before him grows sky-high. That which we call progress is this storm" (Benjamin 1974, p. 6).

On multiple occasions, I caught myself thinking about how this storm, this progress sent from Paradise does not allow the Angel to resurrect the dead and patch all that was broken, and thus make all the loss disappear. Then I realised that this storm in its essence has hope, hope that the generations to come will be wiser and prevent loss from happening. That is all we have and all that rises from the ashes of loss, war, and dissolution- the hope that humanity learns from the past mistakes and does not repeat them.

I hope that this research offers a small contribution in this field, for even though what once was, can no longer return and be corrected, it is my intention to go back to the past and resurrect it from oblivion.

In relation to what once was, Benjamin (1974) talks about melancholy in his essay *On the Concept of History*, and quotes Flaubert saying that to experience an epoch is a procedure of empathy. This attempt originates from the heaviness at heart, the acedia, which is desperate to master the genuine historical picture, which so quickly flashes by. (Benjamin, 1974, p.4).

How better to explain what this research is about, but melancholy. For me this overwhelming sense of loss and lament are always present while remembering the past in Yugoslavia. This research thus tells a story about my experiences of Yugoslavia, its promises and beliefs and as such relies on storytelling. According to Benjamin (1955), the safest of our possessions is the ability to exchange experiences.

While discussing the importance of storytelling, Benjamin (1955) states that the real stories also contain an element of usefulness, either a moral, a practical advice or a proverb or maxim. Therefore, the storyteller is someone who has counsel for a reader. If in any way the idea of counsel is becoming old-fashioned, this is because of the decrease in ability to communicate experience. (Benjamin 1955, p. 364).

However, he also states that the art of storytelling is reaching its end because the epic side of truth- wisdom is dying out and one of the first reasons for this, Benjamin sees in the rise of the novel. What differs a novelist from a storyteller is that a novel is born in isolation. Having been isolated, a novelist cannot ask for counsel and thus, cannot counsel others, while a storyteller tells from experience, his own and that of the others. However, there is a new form of communication which greatly confronts storytelling and brings a crisis in the novel and that is information. Unlike storytelling, which allows us to interpret things as we understand them, information possesses the element of explanation, and in that sense the narrative achieves an amplitude which information lacks (Benjamin 1955, p. 365).

This is particularly evident in relation to the circumstances of the modern age in which we are all overwhelmed by information through the exposure to social media, the Internet, and the news, entering our lives on daily basis from various sources. Today humanity is devoid of the ability to take time to process the information it is exposed to. We lack the immediacy of storytelling, its human side and compassion, which the storyteller and the audience would share in a single moment of mutual interaction. In addition to this, the ways in which storytelling relies on memory has changed with the social media and the platform used today and memorising events and retelling them almost feels redundant. At the same time, this fact affects the quality of the emotional response. In my understanding, these claims also outlined the importance of this research, as it is not only based on information, but on my personal experience and my personal account, presented through the medium of storytelling. This is a relevant point, as according to Benjamin (1955, p. 367) storytelling which originates in the milieu of work- the rural, the maritime and the urban, is an artisan form of communication. It does not convey only the pure essence of a things like information but sinks the thing into the life of a storyteller in order to bring it out of him again.

In addition, storytelling is connected to history which is the tiger's leap into what had happened before. Unfortunately, history possesses an element of being written by the winners and it takes place in an arena in which the ruling class is in control (Benjamin 1974, p. 9). Regardless of this, the revolutionaries are those who exploded the continuum of history in the moment of their action. For example, the Great Revolution introduced a new calendar, and this calendar does not count time like a clock, but according to the monuments of a historical awareness (Benjamin 1974, p. 9). Therefore, it is important to present one's own testimony, through the eyes of a witness, as this account might significantly differ from the account of winners, the ruling class and their official prevailing narrative, and this is precisely one of the aims of this research.

While considering the ways the past events can be presented, the function of remembering itself introduces another variable. One group remembers the past in fear of deviating from its model, the next for fear of repeating the past mistakes:

"Those who cannot remember their past are condemned to relive it" (Assmann and Czaplick 1995, p.134).

Through its cultural heritage, a society becomes visible to itself and to others. Which past becomes evident and which values emerge tells us much about the constitution and tendencies of a society (Assmann and Czaplick 1995, p.134).

Similarly, this research and my personal account of the events surrounding ex- Yugoslavia, serves not only to write down the oral history and both my individual, and the cultural memory of my generation, but also to serve as a memento to which we can return in order not to repeat the past mistakes which marked the dissolution of Yugoslavia.

4.3 Autoethnography

Autoethnography relies on storytelling as it is a qualitative method of narrative writing which focuses on experience, or more precisely, it is research into experience (Clandinin and Connelly 1990, p. 2). As such, it is the most appropriate method to be employed for this research, for it allows the possibility to tell a story which will address the issues of loss, identity, memory and belonging, through the description of wars and crises in ex-Yugoslavia. In addition, writing autoethnography also enables the researcher to rediscover their voice (Spry 2001, p. 708).

According to Laslett (1999) the form of the autoethnographic narrative can be determined by the content and the research question it explores and, in that sense, the autoethnographic research into temporal and spatial aspects, allows looking back on and recounting lives in particular times and spaces. Autoethnography is a way of writing and qualitative research method that focuses of individual's experiences in relation to social and cultural contexts (Custer 2014, p.1).

4.3.1. Autoethnography and Culture

The possibility of translating the lived intersections of self, others, time, and space into autoethnography gives the researcher an opportunity to integrate personal, professional, and political voices (Spry 2001, p.721). In that sense, autoethnography is an ideal method for this research, as it offers the means to present personal experience using the researcher's voice with the purpose of offering sociological understanding (Wall 2008, p.38). Personal narratives are works that situate history, society and the individual voice, and this very intersection of the personal and the societal is a new vantage point that allows for a unique contribution to social science, and artistic research (Laslett 1999, p. 392).

Autoethnography focuses on understanding of culture and society through self, the personal experience is primary data and autobiographical narratives are included in the research process thus distinguishing it from traditional ethnography. Nevertheless, these individual narratives form a bigger story, the story of the society, making autoethnography also ethnographic. The goal is to achieve cultural understanding based on individual experience, self-reflection, analysis and interpretation and reflective writing (Chang 2008, p.49). The research is not happening in isolation, so the personal narrative is always situated within the social contexts as the researcher originates from the context and the researched self, acts within the scopes of the context, reacts to it, or resists it (Chang, Ngunjiri and Hernandez 2010, p.3). Spry (2001, p. 726) states that the embodied autoethnographic text is a story which depends on researchers' collaboration with people, time and culture. It is generated between experience and language, the somatic and semantic, but also between the known and the unknown. In other words, autoethnography utilises language to present experience.

Personal narratives deal with both the social and the individual. They focus on the lives lived within the society where certain values and qualities are shaped by the society itself. Systems of language, values, power, culture, symbols, geographies, and histories are integral parts of a life within the

society. Personal lives are set within the social relationships with family and community and therefore, the narrators that recall them and their impetus are elements of the society as well (Laslett 1999, p. 392).

Grasping these complex notions and transcending the everyday conceptions of selfhood and social life, reveals the ability to write autoethnography, but also to deal with the inner understanding of self within the society. This postmodern condition requires and involves rewriting and requestioning of self and the social (Reed- Danahay 1997, p. 4).

Although autoethnography originates from anthropology and like other self-narratives includes the story-telling feature, it transcends from pure narration by engaging the cultural interpretation as well (Chang 2008, p. 43). Chang (2008, p. 45) further states that this new trend that anthropologists turn their attention inward to self and focus on personal stories as a source of exploration "reveals the purpose of identifying culture through self-reflection while cultural refractions of identity are defining features of autoethnography" (Spry 2001, p. 706).

Spry (2001, p. 708) further endorses this point by saying that she sees herself in a different way after doing the autoethnographic research because for her, it has been a vehicle of emancipation from cultural and familial identity scripts that have structured her identity.

One of the crucial benefits of autoethnography is that it helps a researcher to gain a deeper sense of self through identifying the forces such as nationality, geography, gender, education, religion, and ethnicity that motivate and shape a person and to reach the understanding of these factors or their absence and potential lack of their clarity, and hence share these findings (Chang 2008, p. 52).

This is aptly described by Custer (2014, p.3) who states that through autoethnography he was given the opportunity to reinterpret the fabric of his life's memories, and thus reconstruct his identity. Autoethnography further helped him to alter time and space by reshaping how he perceives the phenomena and individuals from his past life.

As ethnographers began focusing on the multiple viewpoints and multiple voices, they started creating more personal accounts, emphasising the importance of personal stories and reflexivity (Duncan 2004, p.30). As Russel (1998) states, those marginalised individuals who once were the subjects of a more traditional ethnographers' interest can now tell their own story. Considering this fact, I want to tell my personal story using autoethnographic approach to further develop my research.

Several questions are key to autoethnographic research: that of the authenticity of voice and the idea of who speaks on behalf of whom, cultural displacement and exile, identity, and self. The voice of the insider is assumed to be truer than the voice of the outsiders. However, the postmodern conception of self and the society is mirrored in the multiplicity of identities (Reed- Danahay 1997, p. 2) which result from various cultural circumstances, migrations and displacements, and a single identity can take various forms (Reed- Danahay 1997, p. 3). In that sense, according to Reed- Danahay, one of the defining features of an autoethnography is the perspective that an autoethnographer might possess the multiple nature of selfhood and multiple, shifting identities. Autoethnography, as the chosen research methodology, puts the aspects of these shifting multiple identities to the forefront, thus allowing new forms of social writing (Reed- Danahay 1997, p. 3).

In the research process, I also became aware of a limiting sense of understanding in this attempt to make a distinction between an outsider and an insider. The reason behind this lies in the circumstances of the postmodern world which dictate the notion of multiplicity. At the same time the more evident phenomenon of displacement is tightly linked to the rapid sociocultural change, globalisation, and transculturation. Another factor to consider is exile which comes as a consequence of extreme violence, wars, and poverty. This complex set of circumstances influences a breakdown of dualisms of identity and the impossibility of a simplified division to outsiders and insiders (Reed- Danahay 1997, p.4).

According to Mary Louis Pratt (see Spry 1986, p.710) the value of autoethnography is in the fact that it originates from the margins of a dominant culture and the researcher is central with a task of identifying the material, political, and transformational dimensions of representational politics. Autoethnographic methods recognise refractions of multiple selves in contexts that transform I of an author into we of a society.

Pratt (see Reed- Danahay 1997, p.7) discusses modes of resistance to the official prevailing narratives via native account, and debates about the authenticity of the voice within autoethnographic research. In this respect, reality is suddenly observed as not fixed, not necessarily external and without only one standpoint, but shaped by the values and beliefs of an individual and this subjective view allowed for a more personal approach as a research practice (Duncan 2004, p.30). In these various perspectives of events, I perceive the real challenge of writing an autoethnography. However, precisely here, in this possibility of offering a counter perspective to the prevailing one and thus contribute to a gap in current knowledge, lies the strength of the personal narrative (Wall 2008, p.46).

Pratt (2003) further explains autoethnography through the relationship of the colonized and a colonizer in which the native account offers resistance to the dominant discourse by allowing alternative forms of meaning. Autoethnography is a form of ethnography of one's own culture and not only autobiographical writing and as such, it addresses both the dominant culture seen through the prevailing narrative, but also the writer's own group viewpoints (Pratt, 2003, p.3) and the task of an autoethnographic researchers is to re-examine these various stances.

Goodenough (see Chang 1981, p.44), emphasizes the individual as the basic element of culture, as the individuals are those who, by interpreting their social surroundings, offer their version of cultural context (Chang 2008, p.44). For these purposes, this research requires autoethnography as an approach that analyses personal experience in order to reach understandings of wider cultural experience (Skains 2018).

In his article *Author as the Producer*, Benjamin discusses that a correct political writing also includes a literary tendency, and this constitutes the literary quality of work. The work is thus always inserted into the living social contexts. In that sense, when the writing is subjected to materialist critique, it was customary to ask how it depicted the social relations of its time, or their representations through the prevailing narrative, whether it accepts them, or is it reactionary and would like to overthrow them, thus becoming revolutionary (Benjamin 1934, p.76).

Autoethnographic texts interrogate the politics around which the personal narrative is situated, but struggle with the language of dominant politics (Spry 2001, p.722). According to Trihn (see Spry 2010, p.721) a responsible, reflexive autoethnographic text "announces its own politics and evidences a political consciousness. It interrogates the realities it represents. It invokes the teller's story in the history that is told" (Spry 2001, p.722).

In relation to the above claims, my intention is to present a native account which defers from the prevailing narrative for my interpretation of the events surrounding Yugoslavia comes as that of a witness and offers my first-hand testimony.

4.3.2 Further Criticism and Advantages of Autoethnography

One of the questions surrounding autoethnography relates to the fact that researchers are at the same time the objects of research, as they focus on self, and the subjects, as they are the ones undergoing research. For this same reason, autoethnography was criticised by other researchers for the lack of academic rigour, but (Ellis 2009) considers it a powerful and a unique method. Its power lies in the possibility to assess inner thoughts and sensitive issues in order to reach social and personal- individual understanding (Chang, Ngunjiri and Hernandez 2010, p.3).

Aside from the mentioned potential pitfall of using memory and self as a source of research data, autoethnography is often criticised for other unresolved issues and while it emerges and struggles for acceptance, researchers should share their experiences since many of them encounter similar difficulties in relation to data validity, objectivity, quality, ethics, and memory (Wall 2008, p.40).

While criticising autoethnography as a research method, Mendez (2013, p.284) states that the subjective interpretations of phenomena might not be always true, and research should aim at presenting an objective account of the truth.

On the other hand, Wall (2008) argues that presenting the whole truth might not always be possible. In same respect, objectivity is not always possible, especially with personal narrative writing. According to Wall (2008, p.44) autoethnography is not a traditional academic approach and the attempt to retain objectivity might rob an autoethnographic text of its value, as the goal is to engage audience with the story in which they will actively participate and include their emotions and compassion.

Autoethnography connects sociology to literature, requires field work and deals with ethical agenda (Ellis and Bochner 2006, p. 445). Ellis (2007) mentions relational ethics and poses a question on whether we should ask for a consent from others as we include their experiences as a part of our own, since our experiences are shaped in interaction with other people. This is a difficult question and there seems to be no straightforward answer. Researchers might be inclined to experience a sense of guilt because while presenting their own story, they might include lives of other people, whether directly and indirectly, thus invading their privacy. In that sense, Kraus (see Wall 2008, p. 49) states the following "How can I do otherwise than to feel the guilt of making use of another person's life, or borrowing another person's identity, to tell my own story? Kraus (see Wall 2008, p. 49)"

Sometimes the presented views might lead to disputes and conflicts. This is a huge issue, especially when we deal with sensitive topics. However, the fact that it is mostly impossible to separate the personal from the sociocultural context, as only personal experience can be a vehicle of sociological understanding, justifies the usage of autoethnography as a method (Wall 2008, p. 49). Therefore, while conducting autoethnographic research, I had to be straightforward and make the people included in it aware of my intentions and acquire their consent when needed. In that sense, an Ethical Approval was granted by the Nottingham Trent University Research Ethics Committee for this research, in addition to Participant Information Sheet and Participant Consent forms, which clearly state the contents, reasons, and motivating factors of the research, as well as the purpose and intentions of further sensitive and confidential data usage. In addition to these, Data Management plan was required and obtained, and this resulted in the creation of the Nottingham Trent University Data Store: Active Research DataStorage: FemaleVoice SerbianArt where all the evidence related to this research is stored.

According to Chang, Ngunjiri and Hernandez (2010, p.1) research is an extension of researchers' lives and this is my chosen position as well. This systematic approach to socio-cultural understanding distinguishes autoethnography from other qualitative methods such as autobiography or memoir. Although it focuses on self and personal narrative, it also involves data collection and analysis, interpretation about self and social phenomena (Chang, Ngunjiri and Hernandez 2010, p. 2).

Autoethnography is an evocative narrative, and it enables agency. By allowing their voice to be heard, researchers become active participants who reflect on their experience, opposite to only being passive observers of the phenomena around them. As Hitchcock and Hughes (see Mendez 2013, p.282) state, autoethnographers make a shift from being outsiders, as by allowing their voice to act, their role changes to the one of the insiders in the research. Some of the critical positions of autoethnography as a research method I want to exploit, are that research data is easily accessible as researchers rely on themselves and their experiences as primary data source. Additionally, autoethnography has the potential to make or contribute to the positive changes in other people's lives by making or offering a position where they might empathise, reflect, and relate to the story. Realities unknown and unimaginable suddenly become parts of their understanding and this makes the method a valuable source of enquiry. Readers enter the subjective world of the teller (Mendez 2013, p. 282). The unique voice of an autoethnographer is close to the readers, and therefore, they embrace it. It is also a passage through which researchers reach understanding of themselves and the others (Chang 2008, p. 52).

Stories do the work of analysing and theorising. For some sociologists, theory is a categorical ideal which goes beyond personal and immediate experience and reaches some sort of a conclusion about the human condition and offers a definition that is eternally true (Ellis and Bochner 2006, p. 438). The difference between a story and traditional analysis, is in the mode of explanation and the effect on readers. While analysis offers information, narrative enquiry enables continuous communication and thus focuses on multivocality of voices, multiple perspectives, and unsettled, unresolved meanings (Ellis and Bochner 2006, p. 439). The turn toward evocative narratives was set in motion by the desire to set off research storytelling, such as autoethnography, away from traditional empiricist approaches to the analysis of narratives. Ellis and Bochner (2006, p. 440) claim that "If you turn a story told into a story analysed, you sacrifice the story at the altar of traditional sociological rigor. You transform the story into another language, the language of generalization and analysis, and thus you lose the very qualities that make story a story".

On the other hand, the advantage of using autoethnography is in the fact that it is an open conversation about how people live, and it does not offer definitions about the world as it 'truly' is. By engaging in conversations, this method allows multiple voices, stances, and ideas (Ellis and Bochner 2006, p. 435).

Autoethnography is a transformative method as it changes time, alters our perception of the past and its impact onto the present and reshapes our future, if we are open to transformations. It also affects our perspective of space which can be external, corporeal, like a body or a house, or internal such as our beliefs, ideas etc. (Custer 2014, p.2). As Rowe (see Custer 2014, p.2) states, due to its subjective nature, memory can also be observed from different angles and this space and time transformations are crucial to the healing process. According to Custer (2014) autoethnography, enables healing through the integration of our past selves into the present moment. Autoethnography starts as a journey into the subconscious and as an attempt to overcome traumatic events (Custer 2014, p.1). Writing can enhance our understanding of past situations. Personal narrative is a means of growing and transformation. (Custer 2014, p.9) Through this research an attempt is made to test these claims were tested and investigate if and how writing autoethnography influenced my healing and to what extent it helped to overcome past traumas.

In relation to this, I want to examine whether this transformation occurs dramatically for me, as an individual who is courageous enough to reveal my experiences of trauma to the world, by readily embarking on a personal autoethnographic journey. My intention is to pose a question of whether autoethnography really is a transformative research method and to what extent it truly changes time, fosters empathy, embodies creativity and innovation, eliminates boundaries, honours subjectivity, and provides therapeutic benefits (Custer 2014, p.11).

4.3.3 Autoethnography and Vulnerability

Autoethnography in this instance aims to offer an insight into struggle, suffering, embodied life and allows an attempt into sense-making in dire circumstances which are beyond one's comprehension. It is an investigation that requires a reader to be more than just a distant observer as is the case with ethnography. Researcher's intimacy and vulnerability, and willingness to share are entities which cause the reader to empathise, understand and care (Ellis and Bochner 2006, p.432).

Another difficulty I have identified is in the fact that personal and intimate nature of autoethnography makes it one of the hardest qualitative research routes. Since it begins with a personal story (Wall 2008, p .39), autoethnographers recognize the difficulty of the task of presenting an emotionally challenging narrative, even though autoethnography as a research method offers the possibility of expressing it verbally.

"It is reaching deep down into the soul and pulling up trash and scum. It is a dirty job" (Custer 2014, p.3).

One of the important features of autoethnography is that it promotes vulnerability and shame, and thus directly, through self-exposure, helps heal psychological and emotional wounds. Since the nature of autoethnography is shown by engagement, this willingness to engage with vulnerability points out to pure acts of courage (Custer 2014, p.3).

"We become the embodiment of courage through writing" (Custer 2014, p.4).

While trying to be authentic utilising autoethnography, I need to be aware that openness and brutal honesty as stated by Wall (2008, p. 41) might be misunderstood and have possible negative effects. According to Ellis (see Wall 2008, p. 41) and relatable to this research, writing autoethnography is an act of vulnerability as it does not allow me to take back what has been said and my words can be easily misinterpreted by the audience. In this sense, researchers have no true control of how their words will be met and interpreted (Wall 2008, p. 41).

Nevertheless, through the embodiment of a story, autoethnography promotes empathy which further fosters understanding, transformation and healing. This inner trust creates a bond between people who initially may have had nothing in common. In this respect Custer (2014, p.6) states: "Dropping the need to feel secure, becoming vulnerable to the world, and openly inviting judgment breaks down barriers between human beings. In the act of setting aside my fear of exposure, I was able to contribute to the nurturing of empathy. Ultimately, this became one of the most important reasons to write my personal narrative"

Autoethnography allows us to relate to who we were in the past and understand how that translates into our identity today. Radical honesty with oneself with the need to be forgiving, compassionate, and understanding, is needed to be able to find meaning from horrific, painful, or troubling events

(Custer 2014, p.2). By bringing them out into the light of day, their true nature could be witnessed, and they would be permitted to heal (Custer 2014, p.3).

4.3.4 Validating Autoethnography

The fact that autoethnography focuses on self, uses memory as a source of research data, and is a highly personalised account that draws from experiences to extend social understanding, locates it at the boundaries of disciplinary practices. Therefore, it is frequently questioned as valuable research method which still needs to fight for the status of a proper research methodology (Sparkes 2020, p.1).

For me autoethnography can be a challenging method as it addresses questions of representation, objectivity, data validity and ethics, as well as the issue of acceptance by reviewers, and for these reasons it might seem like a strenuous task to focus on ensuring a scholarly account of autoethnography.

While writing my autoethnographic narrative, I have encountered the above-mentioned difficulties in terms of memory, objectivity and thus validity of my research, and after carefully reading into other autoethnographic research and consulting them, I have given special attention to the mentioned issues, and therefore, have positioned my understanding of them in relation to that of the other researchers in the field. Therefore, investigating other autoethnographic examples, enabled me to recognise and foresee the difficulties and shortcomings of my own writing, acknowledge them to myself and make continuous efforts to overcome them.

According to Duncan (2004, p.36), this can be done by overcoming shortages in terms of limited and not efficient reflection and analysis, over relying on the power of narration and emotional responses in audiences, not being honest in relation to the researcher's real motivation and failure to make a connection between personal experience and broader theoretical concepts. The criticism of unscholarly account relates mostly to experimental writings in which boundaries of scholarship are merged with artistic expression (Duncan 2004, p.36). An unreasoned and emotional account can be avoided by using multiple data sources, establishing chain of evidence, and utilising peer review (Yin 2002, p.83). Reliability is also an important issue, and it allows someone else to see the research process and its elements (Duncan 2004, p.36).

According to Richardson (2000) autoethnography should be evaluated as both-science and art. In that sense, he proposes five criteria against which to evaluate any autoethnography: substantive contribution, aesthetic merit, reflexivity, the impact the narrative causes on the reader, and how much the narrative expresses reality. In that sense, Richardson (2000 p. 254) explains the five criteria:

- "1. Substantive contribution: Does this piece contribute to our understanding of social life? Does the writer demonstrate a deeply grounded (if embedded) human-world understanding and perspective? How has this perspective informed the construction of the text?
- 2. Aesthetic merit: Does this piece succeed aesthetically? Does the use of creative analytical practices open up the text, invite interpretive responses? Is the text artistically shaped, satisfying, complex and not boring?
- 3. Reflexivity: How did the author come to write this text? How was the information gathered and how have the ethical issues been resolved? How has the author's subjectivity been both a producer and a product of this text? Is there adequate self-awareness and self-exposure for the

reader to make judgments about the point of view? Do authors hold themselves accountable to the standards of knowing and telling of the people they have studied?

- 4. Impact: Does this affect me? emotionally? intellectually? generate new questions? move me to write? move me to try new research practices? move me to action?
- 5. Expresses a reality: Does this text embody a fleshed out, embodied sense of lived experience? Does it seem "true"—a credible account of a cultural, social, individual, or communal sense of the "real"? Creative arts are one lens through which to view the world; analytical/science is another. We see better with two lenses. We see best with both lenses focused and magnified ".

In this instance, I want to emphasise how the most important element of a qualitative study is its usefulness. According to Eisner (1991) there are several elements that make a study useful. The first one relates to usefulness of apprehension and comprehension- how and to what extent does a narrative bring understanding to a reader and how does it clarify a situation which would otherwise stay confusing. Secondly, qualitative research is only useful if it can help readers to anticipate future scenarios, serve as warnings and help improvements. In that sense, for example, the shared knowledge of my personal experiences of war and loss might serve as a warning and deterrent against future conflicts. Thirdly, research is useful if it acts as a guide to the issues that would otherwise be missed, and it examines aspects that might go unnoticed (Eisner 1991, p.59).

In the similar manner, while reviewing autoethnographic texts, Ellis (2000, p. 275) poses a series of questions, such as what is there to learn from the story about social life. She asks about the new knowledge or a possibility of a new view in the known knowledge. Further on, she asks whether there are unexplainable holes in the plot or inability to recognise significant points. Another important aspect is whether the story is useful and whether it promotes dialogue.

Ellis (2000, p.275) also asks whether the author legitimately makes the claims for his/her story and how. This is one of the questions about validating research data in autoethnography I asked myself during the research process and thus, discussed my findings regarding this issue in the chapter about memory. Aside from the mentioned, important aspects are also the goals, claims, and achievements of the author, and in this respect, Ellis (2000) asks whether the author managed to achieve these goals and whether they are worthwhile goals met by the written form.

Another point to touch upon is the issue of ethical considerations, in terms of getting the permission to portray others. In that sense, Ellis asks whether the contribution of the story justifies the potential pain it can cause to characters and readers (Ellis, 2000, p. 276.)

In my opinion the relevance of this research is in the fact that it primarily preserves the memory of a historical epoch that no longer exists and the story behind it includes the people who experienced it. I have made attempts not to include personal names, aside from those of my mainly deceased family members. The other people included in this research were informed of my intentions and those interviewed signed the Participant Consent form. Aside from this, my research and my narrative are deeply personal, and the fact that I decided to allow my testimony to see the light of day, was my conscious decision. While making this decision, I was aware that it will not be easy, and that experiencing pain will be inevitable at times, but that this research will bring a unique contribution and a new knowledge which will make the final result worth these challenges. My choice was not to forget about the loss and tragic circumstances that followed the dissolution of my country, but to narrate them, and to bring my small contribution to writing my native historical account.

4.3.5 Art and Autoethnography

Many artists have based their work on the intersection between art and autoethnography. For example, Mary Kelly (1983) in her *Postpartum Document* addresses the relationship between a child and a mother, by creating an installation which consists of six consecutive sections comprising of 135 small units. Her installation was originally displayed as an exhibition and was then reproduced into a book (Kelly 1983, p. XV). According to Kelly, the book is neither an autobiography nor a traditional narrative, for even though it is a first-person narrative, it poses questions, and deals with the problem around the patriarchal idea of motherhood, which is continually addressed, with no resolution reached. Instead of a resolution, there is only a replay of moments of separation and loss, which are presented both visually and textually. She uses a combination of found objects, diaries, and diagrams, and allows several readings of work through the juxtaposition of objects and commentary in diagrams. The goal here was to avoid pulling the visible more into the readable and setting the opposition between the text and the image by allowing one to become the other (Kelly 1983, p. XVII). For example, transitional objects include a child's blanket and mother's memorabilia, such as hand imprints in plaster, first shoes or locks of hair and diary texts inscribed on fragments of found objects. These functioned both as confessional, representing mother's process of working outside home, but also polemic, as they addressed the problem of separation anxiety (Kelly 1983, p.97).

According to the artist, *Postpartum document* is not an autobiography nor an artistic monograph, as it represents an interplay of voices and includes personal, mother's experience, feminist analysis, political debate and includes academic discussion (Kelly 1983, p. XVIII).

Working around similar issues by asking questions of the positionality of a female artist/researcher in higher education, Diab (2020) discusses the importance of autoethnography as an acceptable academic practice, which gives a permission to be messy, human uncertain beings (Diab, 2020, p.174). In her research, she uses body to express her experience of working in academia as a woman, thus criticising the patriarchy within the institution (Diab, 2020, p.170). Through a series of photographs of engaging in hula hooping, she presents her embodied experience with academic culture, as well as ways to resist the conventional academic practice. The process enabled her to feel better connected to her body, by allowing her to take risks and be vulnerable. Through using autoethnography alongside artistic practice, she managed to reconnect with the reasons she joined HE (Diab 2020, p.184).

In similar sense, she uses writing to expose ways in which her intellectual abilities were affected by derogatory messages via institutional sexism, and she was seen as an imposter, simply for being a woman in academia. Vulnerability here comes to the forefront, as she is aware that light will be shown on weaknesses and aspects of her professional life, one would like to remain hidden. By making visual artwork which comprises of an academic gown, embroidered with messages, and exhibiting it in academic setting, the artist allows her weaknesses to become evident. Adding autoethnographic writing to this process enhances vulnerability, as the issues which have a more confessional and personal aspect, reach public realm and their longevity is allowed. This is one of the dangers of writing an autoethnography that the author is aware of, for no matter how empowering exposure of vulnerability might seem to the author, these exposed weaknesses could be potentially used against her in the realm of competitive academia. However, she decides to pursue this, having understood that disclosing these difficulties might diminish obstacles and help those who are dealing with similar problems (Diab 2017, p.91).

With art based autoethnographies, authors are even more subject to vulnerability once these forms of representation become public. While considering issues of vulnerability by subjecting artists' practice to scrutiny, Bartleet (2021) mentions the challenge of balancing aesthetic and artistic concerns with the rigors of the research processes (Bartleet 2021, p. 139). In case of text-based forms of representation which accompany artistic output, the challenge is also how to make sure these twin narratives work together and speak to each other. In addition, revealing the personal and vulnerable

parts of creative lives may feel risky to artists, however, this process can also be highly inspiring, rewarding, and even liberating, especially when autoethnography is itself lyrical and artistic (Bartleet 2021, p. 141).

In addition to this, art testimony allows a possibility for transformation, as artists who speak about trauma, also contribute of the healing process of others, and can influence the collective healing as well (Mihaljinac 2016, p.112). Testimonies of paralysed witnesses or those who remained unresponsive during traumatic events, represent autobiographical narrative, but are also a credible historical source, thus making such narratives autoethnographic. Worth of mention here, are artworks such as photographs and a comic *Door* by Danijel Savovic, *Vitak 1999*, photographs by Ivan Petrovic, *Ratni dnevnik u stripu – NATO bombing of Yugoslavia* by Zorana Jovic Letac, *Somnus ambulare*, prints by Tatjana Kojic and *Natural mystic*, video by Anri Sala (Mihaljinac 2016, p.113).

In this respect, Serbian artist Stojcetovic Goran, in his drawings expressed his traumas, thoughts and feelings related to the experience endured through the exposure to NATO bombing of Serbia in 1999, and the previous breakup of Yugoslavia. For the first time, together with artists such as Joskin Siljan and Danijel Savovic, he talked publicly about the series of drawings called *Apartment, Basement, Accommodation*, as the artwork in question, was produced in the basement which served as a shelter to many people during the air raids (Mihaljinac 2016, p.114). If we take into consideration NATO bombing of Yugoslavia, the occurrence of a dominant idea is directly evident. The governing idea is fear of death. The involved individuals are in the close and imminent contact with danger and possibility of dying. However, even though the theme of these artworks has a focus on bombing, the research project also tackles the issues surrounding the politics during ex-Yugoslavia. The crucial issue addressed by Stojcetovic, in this sense, is the very notion of SFRY (Socialist Federative Republic of Yugoslavia) which was considered to be a metaphor of paradise, peace and utopia. Bombing just sealed the end of that idealistic belief of unity, peace, and love (Mihaljinac, 2016, p.113).

Other difficulties while using the combination of autoethnography and artistic practice were noted. There are examples of autoethnographic elements in visual work, used for purposes which significantly deferred from those of the author's intention. In addition to this, the path of art practice, especially photography, was not always straightforward, and there is ample evidence of its paradoxical status in bourgeois society. (Sekula 1986, p.3) In this respect, Sekula (1986) shares a story about a young Black South African photographer Ernest Cole who created a series of photographs in 1967. He photographed the South African society and mapped out various checkpoints of apartheid (Sekula 1986, p.63). One of the dilemmas and hardships of pursuing photographic practice on ground patrolled by the police, was how to justify the nature of his endeavour. Having been questioned after he photographed arrests of black people who were outside of allowed zone, he had to justify himself by saying that he was gathering material for a book on juvenile delinquency. Having heard that, the police who operated on the system of informers, invited him to join the ranks. He fled the country and published his book with photographs in exile. The problem here is in not allowing such testimonies to fall in the wrong hands and the job of artists and writers is to make sure these are not cancelled by more authoritative and official texts.

In the field of visual arts, autoethnography has offered ways to enable artists to contextualise and communicate personal stories through their artistic experience (Bartleet 2021, p.133). At the interface of autoethnography and artistic research, a dynamic combination of approaches and multi-modes of enquiry becomes possible (Bartleet 2021, p.134). In addition to this, autoethnographic combined with artistic quest, often result in reordering the conventional research sequence. Therefore, it is almost inevitable that this kind of enquiry does not offer finite answers, but rather opens questions at the end of the research process. At the heart of such research is a genuine desire to break the traditional ways of knowing, while the result of research process, regardless of the media used to present it, creates a new reality (Bartleet, 2021, p. 138). In this respect, Bartleet (2021) mentions improvisation which allows autoethnographers to pursue new modes of enquiry and explore open spaces where unplanned might be central to research. However,

this area is still to be investigated as autoethnographers are still to discover means to employ improvisation and base their research on it (Bartleet 2021, p.139).

Therefore, the future potential of artistic autoethnography, lies in the fact that it is a creative mode of inquiry, but also an instigator of personal, disciplinary, and broader social change (Bartleet 2021, p.142).

4.4 Site writing methodology

"Memory attaches itself to sites while history attaches itself to events" (Nora 1989, p. 22).

This research utilises autoethnography as a qualitative research method which relies on self but also uses the context orientated site works, in order to investigate and reach understanding about the self in interaction with others within the social context, therefore, the personal narrative writings in this research are to be both self-conscious and context oriented (Chang, Ngunjiri and Hernandez 2010, p. 1). In that sense, autoethnography can be defined as a narrative that criticises situatedness of self within the cultural context (Spry 2001, p. 710).

"Cultural geographers have argued that the relationship between space and social relations is two-way: people make spaces and spaces make people" (Rendell 2004).

In addition to this, autoethnography investigates internal conditions, such as feelings and emotions, external conditions, such as sociocultural context and environment, and temporal aspect which includes past, present, and future (Clandinin and Connelly, 1990, p.9). Therefore, this research is partly fuelled by my memories related to various places, souvenirs from my past, and present associations which are directly derived from the past events. At different segments in my narrative, present events and moments overlap with the past ones or are positioned in correlation to them.

"From where she is looking, the room shifts in her memory, her focus changes. Looking back into the past, there are many places where eyes might meet" (Rendell 2003).

To address the questions, aims and objectives of the research, my intention is to set this autoethnographic site writing into a personalised context for the following reasons:

The effort to explore the ways in which writing can coincide with the spatial features, sites and places, is one of the governing features of site writing. Writing itself is inserted within the site and originates from it and the challenge is to discover how the structure and processes of writing relate with those of the site and how these material qualities of sites, its history, culture, people and power relations and their consequences, such as wars and crises, can be mirrored in writing (Rendell 2001).

Site writing as a critical and spatial practice, deals with ethics and focuses on writing of history, theory and criticism resulting from "situatedness and site specificity". It promotes discussions as writers reflect on their own subject positions and the ways in which their writing will engage with the

specificity of sites they explore. These sites can be material, political but also conceptual, thus resulting from thoughts, memories, or imagination (Rendell 2001).

Hence, autoethnography and site writing as methodology, allow me to explore both sites and my memories connected to them and to develop and externalise the inner dialogue. In addition to this, situating the research close to my home allows insight into our culture (Duncan 2004, p.29).

Site writing is tightly connected with photographic practice as the sites described in the written narrative are presented in photographs and are also starting points for my development of microscope photography.

5. DISCUSION CHAPTER

Drawing on the photographic works of Reinartz and Levin (see Baer 2002) and their representation of the Holocaust through the landscape photography, which presents absence in order to create a passionate and emotional response in audience, different to that of archival photography, this research went deeper in the photographic field in order to tackle intangible aspects of human life, such as our emotions, to present the issues outlined in the research question.

In addition to that, I conducted a series of interviews with artists who originate from the same geographical area as me, to test the validity of my claims. Therefore, as this research, being autoethnographic, involves the lives of other people who surrounded me and whose destinies touched mine, an ethical approval was needed to conduct this PhD research. For the same purpose, I conducted a literature review on the issues discussed in this research, through the lens of other researchers, artists, and practitioners from ex-Yugoslavia. By analysing their artworks, findings, experiences, and opinions, I mirrored my own writing and my art practice against theirs. Therefore, I validated my written narrative by offering various perspectives of the events and issues discussed in this research.

The research was inspired by the artworks of female artists such as Marina Abramovic and Tanja Ostojic. Although my practice-based research is not as revolutionary and reactionary as the art practice of the mentioned artists, who used their art as a response to the circumstances of war and dissolution of Yugoslavia which surrounded them, one of the goals of this research is to add to the female voice in this respect. Therefore, it was important for this research to be informed by their practices, although through the choice of a medium other than the medium of performance art. In the similar sense a series of paintings, *Transatlantica* by Milena Dragicevic also presents the idea of frailty of the notion of home and belonging, and I found it interesting to draw from different disciplinary approaches to these similar issues.

All these different approaches which deal with my chosen subject matter, outlined in the research question, helped me stir the research towards the usage of one discipline- photography. In addition, drawing on the theoretical concepts of Eril (2008), and using photography as a trace and as evidence of something that refers to the past and therefore triggers remembering rather than memory itself, allowed me to present my personal testimony to narrate the past events related to ex-Yugoslavia and its dissolution.

In the similar sense, Serbian photographers, Ivan Petrovic, and Danijel Savovic created visual testimonies to present their responses to traumas that they were subjugated to during the military training in Kosovo while the conflict was ongoing. In addition, these artists dealt with the treatment of photography as a document of situations in their immediate surrounding. Especially in the case of Petrovic, photographic practice deals with the questions and phenomenon of the archive, photographic truth, and photography as a testimony (Aftermathsee 2014). However, even though both artists created autoethnographic photography to include their experiences during the conflict, their photographs, even though they depicted the circumstances surrounding the life in Serbia and the conflict in Kosovo, are primarily archival. Contrary to this, I focused on the usage of autoethnography in artistic research and developed an interest into pursuing how to present the issues outlined in the research question differently than only as evidence or a document or the subjective representation of the historical truth. It was my intention to go deeper into investigation of the photographic medium to present the issues in the way in which they have not been presented before. This eventually led to the photographic exploration of intangible issues of the human existence, in this research presented through the microscope photography.

It was my intention to develop the research through the deep investigation of limits of photographic medium and in this respect, I see a similarity to the aforementioned art practices, as in the case of representation of Holocaust using landscape and raising these important questions about the

difficulty of representing trauma and the politics of witnessing, according to Baer (2000). My aim was to develop my art practice to scratch the surface and present otherwise invisible aspects of human life. I chose this different approach to present the issues I found in other artists' art practices in a new way, to create a deeper insight which has not been offered before and here lies the contribution to knowledge in this respect.

To demonstrate how I used microscope photography to present my memory of my life during Yugoslavia as my visual, emotional testimony, and the ways in which I approached the issues of loss, identity, belonging, trauma, and memory, I decided to verbally dissect a couple of microscope photographs which best convey my intention and the demonstrate the usage of the medium to present the aforementioned.

One of the happiest moments I recall from my childhood is seeing my grandad returning from work in his factory work uniform on a motorbike. For me, this meant sweets and small tokens of love. That uniform which I connect to my long-gone dream of homeland, is still safely stored in my wardrobe, not because it serves any purpose, but because of the warmth it used to represent. Therefore, samples of threads and the button placed under a microscope, commemorate that memory of having a home and the nostalgia of the safety it represented. The soft cloud- like texture in the images of the uniform, stands for the dreamy atmosphere of believing in Yugoslav most sacred values, appreciation, value of hard work, self- management system and the wonderful illusion of equality. The generosity and the noble soul my grandad used to possess, to me is still evident in my memory of his belief in these communist values. His naivety cost him later in the years of his life, the years that brought the end to that dream, the years of crises, displacement of our closest relatives, poverty, inflation and overall tragedy and bleak horror that superseded the dream of homeland. The contrasted images of the black button and the uniform thread, placed in a photographic sequence, stand for the disillusionment which dissolution of Yugoslavia brought, but also for the emotional atmosphere which I recall, and which coloured our lives, once stripped of our motherland and bare bleak, dark days, suddenly devoid of meaning.

In addition, some of the archival photographs that depict of the Monument to the Revolution in Ruma, Serbia, in my opinion stand for the strength of the communist ideal, something seemingly firm, undestroyable, permanent and solid, as the material the Monument was made of. The irony is that the Monument outlived the political system it represented and stood contrary to the challenge of time. Its history remembered by my generation remains irrelevant to the generations that followed and today the monument in my hometown simply has a decorative function. On multiple occasions the narrative in this thesis is placed around the monument in various time frames to depict the changing political climate surrounding it. To me, it represented the firmness of Yugoslav ideals and something heart-warming and safe. To the generations that followed the dissolution it has a different meaning. I used microscope photography in this sense to depict, in my own way, the changing meaning of symbols. This can be related to Rasa Todosijevic's installation *Light and Darkness of Symbols*. Unlike this artwork which is in the form of installation and which challenges what symbols represent historically, and is generally and seemingly unrelated to a specific cultural and historical context, I chose a photographic medium and presented my understanding of one particular symbol of Yugoslav battle for freedom, the monument and its changing purpose through microscope photography, with an attempt to go deep into the very core and colour of emotions related to what the symbol represented to me personally.

In addition to these, I found great similarity in Yurchak's description of paradox in relation to the Soviet system (2005). In a similar way the Yugoslav system did produce a lot of suffering, repression, and lack of freedom for some people. However, all those fundamental values and all the good ideas surrounding the communist ideology, such as equality, importance of education, cultural values, friendship were genuine during Yugoslavia, and they were the basis on which life was grounded. They represented the acquired set of beliefs and principles of behaviour for most citizens of Yugoslavia, and this is where my understanding of nostalgia originates from. As I stated before, similarly to the case of the Soviet nostalgia, Yugonostalgia is something very real, and for some people like me still obvious. This extremely relatable notion in Svetlana Boym's understanding, is the reflective nostalgia (2002) which in its essence has loss and belonging and dreams of a better life. I used these theoretical concepts to frame my own personal

narrative around the loss that followed the dissolution of Yugoslavia. These concepts also allowed me to make attempts to describe Yugonostalgia which, even though similar to the Soviet one, was also unique in its own aspects. In addition to this, I used this research to present a story about Yugoslavia which is contrary to some of the prevailing narratives, which surrounded the Yugoslav war, and again I found great similarity to Yurchak's intention to do justice to the truth of a witness. In my understanding this is precisely what he aimed at, through his own writing about the Soviet system and the break-up of the Soviet Union. I firmly believe that the importance of my research lies in the fact that it offers a different perspective and the opposition to a one-sided approach and limited understanding of Yugoslav conflict.

In Yurchak's words, the prevailing narrative did not bring justice to the internal paradoxes of life during Soviet socialism, and it did not fully describe the Soviet reality (Yurchak 2005). Bearing this in mind, the greatest value of my research is that it visually and verbally brings new knowledge as it portrays an image based on the life of ordinary people, not on the official political narrative or the official understanding of what the war or life in Yugoslavia were like. Therefore, through the eyes of a witness, the importance of the native account of this research comes to the foreground.

Presenting at conferences allowed me to hear my own voice which was indeed very different to the process of writing. Hearing my narrative and seeing the photographs in the actual conference space, made me also reflect on the best ways to present the research. At first, due to the fact that my research is so personal, I felt very vulnerable while presenting. Therefore, I made a choice to create pre-recorded films which included both practice and narrative, and I found this form of presenting very successful, as it did not allow me to become overwhelmed or let emotions prevent me from presenting the research in the most optimal way. This also simplified the online conference presentations and webinars, as having that back-up file, prevented anything unplanned from happening as was, for example, the case with my presentation at the online conference in Bangkok, when technical issues prevented me from joining.

In addition, seeing the microscope photographs as parts of a pre-recorded video, made me realise that this virtual presentation works best. Since they have been made using a microscope, having light work through them simply made the image more powerful and therefore, I decided to use a video while exhibiting, as was the case with my solo show in Trondheim, but also during my Viva presentation. This was also inspired by the idea of making a projection visible, thus presenting the microscope photography in its full potential. The video can be accessed and found on my website: ivanapuskas.com.

Other issues I encountered during the process of writing my personal narrative, were tightly related to vulnerability, as described by Custer (2014) and stating that writing a personal account requires dropping the need to be secure and opening up to the idea of allowing our traumas to see the light of day. I found this extremely challenging, both in terms of presenting my research findings in conferences, but also for the fact that we cannot unwrite what has already been written. I encountered many doubts related to which parts of the narrative I really want exposed via publishing. Even in these final stages, I find myself rethinking about parts of my narrative, particularly those which include my father, as I do not want the memory of him to be reduced only to the troublesome and traumatic circumstances of his dying. He was a proper gentleman and an intellectual before the Yugoslav war and he took care of me when I was a child. However, this part of narrative writing was relevant to show my personal experience of what effect the clash of communist belief and our ideologies, together with the exposure to war, had on our lives.

Bartleet (2021, p. 141) recognised this very problem regarding autoethnography, stating that revealing the personal and vulnerable parts of creative lives may feel risky to artists, however, this process can also be highly inspiring, rewarding, and even liberating, especially when autoethnography is itself lyrical and artistic.

Looking at the ways various artists approached this problem of vulnerability in autoethnography and used their art practice to deal with the exposure of the intimate elements of their experience, such is the case with Kelly and Diab, made me truly recognise the power of autoethnography and it is my intention to further pursue research in this respect. Autoethnography and artistic practice unified will continue to be my chosen research methodology.

5.1 Methods Used: Details on Photography

5.1.1 Taking and Making Images

During the research process, over 300 photographs were taken, mostly with a NIKON Z camera and some with a mobile phone. Most of the times photographs were taken in the afternoon hours and in various seasons. For some of the photographs, I used a mobile phone because at times, I felt it might be safer and seemingly less serious as I blended with the other bystanders. Therefore, I chose to be on the safe side and used my mobile phone.

Some of the photographs were taken in summer, as I planned a trip to Belgrade to take photographs of buildings devastated by 1999 bombing of Serbia. Similar site writing trips required travelling to Croatia and Northern Macedonia, and these trips were mostly safe. However, I did experience certain difficulties, for example with a taxi driver in Macedonia and while filming an abandoned church in Croatia while driving a car with Serbian registration plates, as described in the narrative.

Some of the abandoned places I visited could have been potentially dangerous. A good example of this was the bus station in my hometown Ruma, with sheets of glass wool hanging from the ceiling and which could have fallen on me at any time. Potentially dangerous was also the abandoned military base in Croatia, as it was surrounded with wire and had a roof which seemed a bit unstable.

These trips also served to gather the samples later used to create microscope photographs. I chose the samples which emotionally resonated to my memories related to Yugoslavia, as in the case of samples from I tree in the street where I grew up. For the creation of microscope photographs, I used the Bresser LCD MICR5MP microscope, magnification: 50x-500x, 1000x (digital), which has an integrated camera and can take images straight away onto the memory card.

After the period of making the images, I was engaged in editing the visual material and dealing with the issue of creating design and the choice and amount of microscope photographs to be included in the thesis, as there were over 150 at first. With the help of my supervisor, Dr Katja Hock, senior lecturer in photography at Nottingham Trent University, a careful selection was made to include the most meaningful photographs, in terms of their correspondence with the issues outlined in this research and their high aesthetic visual value. We also talked about the relationships and made a mutual decision to have the microscope photographs presented within the body of text in a triptych which resembles altar pieces and provides a narrative; a collage, starting with the original photograph of a place or object from which the samples originate; in a sequence on a single page, and finally as single photographs spread out over one or two pages.

I was especially interested in using collage and exploring juxtaposition, considering that under the influence of computers and the Internet, the photographic image is no longer synonymous with camerawork and the possibilities of post-production are enormous, thus enabling photography to become an even more creative medium. There is a multitude of examples where digitalisation has turned photographs into one type of collage or another. The strategies of collage are almost endless due to the fact that collage is a medium that embraces almost everything- remaking.

juxtaposition, layering and reorganising. With the rise of collage, imagination and feeling, fantasy and sarcasm, expressiveness and intellect have ample room to operate (Confino 2016).

The fact that digital collage combines images makes it more allusive than traditional photography. This is one of the reasons I decided to use juxtaposition with microscope photographs, for once juxtaposed, two things create a dialogue which may be literal or not (McIntyre 2014, p.7). In addition, this research also used the power of visual metaphor to present, through texture, structure, colour, deeper meanings, and connections.

Working with altered photographs can be our way of examining our surroundings and how we relate to it. It allows a possibility to play the role of a storyteller and presenting a narrative from one's own point of view using the universal language of imagery, which can transcend words (Michel 2011, p.8).

Usage of collage also builds on my MA research in drawing and therefore, I am not new to the medium. It is only the way I exploited and investigated the use of collage that differs in my PhD research and allows a deeper investigation into its possibilities.

5.1.2 Site-writing and Autoethnographic Writing

In terms of composing the personal narrative, the embodied experience was the point of focus. Certain bits of writing were, for example, created on the back of the receipts while working at the University cafes and whenever I got the opportunity to write. Some of these texts were written in this manner, due to my inability to work in the research office, and the work commitments in the university restaurants and canteens, as I never had any funding and had to work my way through my PhD. I tried to utilise the time when we were not busy in the café to write the narrative.

Therefore, part of my methodology, related to my personal narrative, emerged through the various situations, and some resulted from insomnia at those night hours when my brain works fast due to anxiety issues. I feel that my memories were the clearest in those night hours and the narrative came out as a flood. It was a process of cleansing my mind and a way to deal with my traumas. In my opinion, the best parts of the narrative were composed in those wake night hours. I knew where the story starts and ends because I was a protagonist, and I simply followed the path of my recollections, and wrote them down as they were emerging in my memory. Therefore, there is not necessarily a chronological order of events, as memory is also not linear. Amongst the pages and pages written, I chose the ones that are ethnographic, as my goal was not to write a biography, but a story about the Yugoslav society, its clash and the issues outlined in the research question.

Further on, these pieces of writing developed as an element of a larger whole and led to the creation of a notebook in the form of a research journal, which is the chosen element of methodology within this research as well, and this notebook was developed throughout the research process. It served as a starting point and included thorough results of literature examination, sites and exhibitions visited, visual and other documentation. Initial thoughts, reflections on literature, initial ideas for pieces of narrative, narratives written on the back or receipts, visual parts of research, pieces of memories are all compiled within the research journal. These miniature pieces of puzzle were the points of reflection and were revisited and consulted during the research process.

Quite a large part of the research period, in the duration of over a year, was marked by many challenges in terms of the covid virus restrictions, but at the same time, lockdown offered an amazing opportunity for my research to flourish and fully develop. As a result of this miraculous turn of events for

me and my research activities, I have managed to fully compile the body of practice texts and methodology chapter. Therefore, the lockdown allowed me time to read, reflect and write, the time which, having to work, would otherwise be impossible for me to find.

Aside from personal narrative writing, in order to address the questions, aims and objectives set out in the research, I used autoethnographic site writing as a research method, and placed it into a personalised context. The goal here was to explore the ways in which writing can coincide with the special features, sites, and places in order to properly present the society around ex-Yugoslavia. Certain parts of writing originate from sites, and the challenge was to discover how the structure and processes of writing relate with those of the sites and how these material qualities of sites, memories connected to them, and events such as Yugoslav civil war found its representation in writing (Rendell 2001). For the purpose of getting informed with the technique of site writing I got familiar with the content of the site writing website, https://site-writing.co.uk/

Via field trips to ex-Yugoslav countries: Croatia, Serbia, and Macedonia, using site- writing and sites as a source of associations to compose the personal narrative, I created a new body of visual and written knowledge, and used my hometown to present a unique micro cosmos which depicted circumstances of life in Yugoslavia before and after its dissolution. Photographs of places were a source of inspiration for both the personal narrative and microscope photography, and photographs of certain sites, such as the abandoned bus station in Ruma, Serbia, were used in juxtaposition with microscope photographs to form a collage. Therefore, site writing is tightly connected with photographic practice, as the sites are also present, both literary and metaphorically in photographs, and are also starting points for my development of microscope photography.

Field trips also allowed me to test the quality of my own memories and to offer a temporal distance in my understanding of the events connected to these specific places.

5.1.3 Archival Practices

The process of gathering the archival material was quite straightforward. Initially, the primary source was the public library *Atanasije Stojkovic* in Ruma. The visual material was collected out of brochures, books, and travel guides. My goal was to source out as many images related to Yugoslavia as possible, with the purpose of presenting the ethnographic elements within my narrative to reach the final goal of portraying the Yugoslav society and embodied life within the frames of my personal story. During my several visits to the library, even though I took over 130 photographs out of the mentioned material, after a careful selection, I decided to use the images from a book Rumaer Dokumentation 1745- 1945 by Franz Wilhelm. The reason for this decision was the fact that they best depict the circumstances of my own childhood, in terms of the lifestyle, which was a direct consequence of the blend of different cultures. Relevant, in this respect, was the German culture, traditions, architecture and the mark they left in my hometown Ruma, which remained even though the German people were forced to leave after the Second World War. My great grandmother was German and my great grandfather Croatian, and the area where I grew up, was mostly inhabited by people who were not Orthodox Serbian, which made the division between Serbian and Croatian nationalities even more obvious during the Yugoslav civil war, as thoroughly explained in the *Chasing Ghosts* section of this research. In any case, German lifestyle and rule which preceded Yugoslavia left a huge trace in the Vojvodina area, today Serbia, where I grew up.

After 5 days of looking through the material I gathered during my visits to the library, following a careful process of selection, I based elements of my narrative in chapter 5 on the 4 photographs sourced out of the mentioned book. They were a direct reminder of circumstances of my early life and were a valuable source of my memories in this respect. They also helped me frame my understanding of the shape of the Yugoslav society and its diversity. All these minorities Croatian, Slovak, German and Hungarian, retained their own lifestyles within the Yugoslav society and even spoke their

own languages during Yugoslavia and therefore the truth is that there were Yugoslavs in Vojvodina who could not speak the official Serbo-Croatian language as they had their own mother tongue. This multi-layered nature of the Yugoslav society was later one of the main reasons for conflicts.

However, the most valuable source I used, was the archival material from the County Museum in Ruma, and I found an abundant photographic material related to Yugoslavia before and after the breakup and material related to the NATO bombing and demonstrations that followed it. Most of these photographs were made in and around Ruma, my hometown, and this allowed me to frame the narrative around Ruma, to use it as a metaphor of life and society during and after Yugoslavia. Surprisingly, I did not find any textual material to accompany these photographs, and I realised how big of a gap this was, and that the contribution to knowledge of this research lies in this narrative. In that sense, my personal narrative offered a correspondence to the gathered archival photography which presented evidence to justify my memories of Yugoslavia. In terms of consent to use the images, there were no issues whatsoever, and the museum officials were happy to give their permission, as long as the rights of ownership were clearly stated, and the text of their choice accompanied the photographs.

In terms of printing the photographic material and the thesis itself, I found the NTU print shop at Nottingham Trent University very helpful. I had their assistance in terms of the choice of material to print the images on and in terms of printing test images. At first, I printed a series of photographs on different types of paper, but after a careful selection, I chose 148gsm Mohawk matt paper, as I felt that it best presents the microscope photographs without the distraction that gloss might cause. These photographs were presented during my solo show in Trondheim, Norway.

Thesis was printed in two copies, hardbound so that it also represents an object which unites both photographic practice and the personal narrative.

5.1.4 Interviewing and Exhibiting

I used the online page Arts Jobs, Open Calls, Residencies and Artist Opportunities# Visual Arts and Likovni Konkursi on Facebook, Contest Watchers, JAR calls and journals such as Calvert Journal, Photography and Culture, but also opportunities sent via NTU email, as was the case of Manchester Metropolitan University conference, in which I was awarded the first place for my video and installation. This was my first big conference and my success encouraged me to keep applying for other opportunities.

However, finding all the appropriate opportunities was a job in itself and required time to search through the offered ones and find those that best suited my research. While writing applications, I took extra time to read through the requirements to see whether my research fits the needs of the call and whether exhibiting and my contribution and participation in a certain opportunity would also benefit my research. After I careful selection of calls, which were related to the issues outlined in my research question, I would write my application. In various calls, I found great interest in the issues I explore and learnt that belonging, home and identity, are indeed burning issues, shared by other researchers who ask these relevant questions. My applications to such calls were generally successful and I was happy to contribute to *Home Symposium* at the University of Gloucestershire and this participation was fruitful in more ways than one as outlined in the previous sections. This contribution is ongoing, and I participated in the *Committee on Activism* in Madrid in September 2023 having been invited by the organisers of the Home Symposium. The next conference I was invited to, by the same team, will take place in Istanbul in 2024. This networking opportunity will also allow me to publish a chapter in Routledge publication *Longing and Belonging* in 2024.

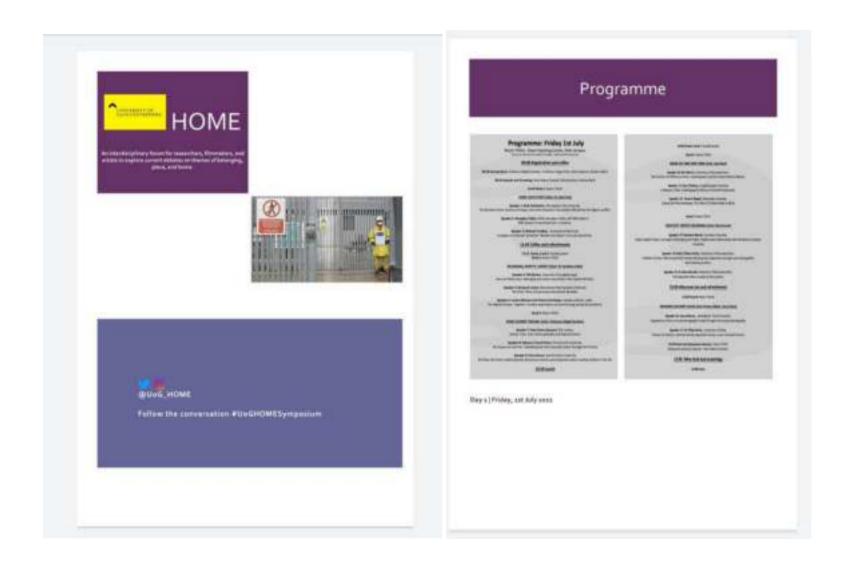


Figure 141: Home, Symposium, 2022, University of Glouchestershire, UK

In addition to this, I was invited to participate, on more than one occasion, in *the Feminist Art Colony* in Sicevo, Serbia, organised by the *Centre for Girls*, Nis, Serbia. During the residency, I made some of the crucial interviews I used in the thesis. I met likeminded women from the same social context who lived through the Yugoslav Civil war and whose art was also aimed at presenting the conflict and their search for identity after the dissolution. Artworks created there and then, showed me how some of those women relied on their emotions while presenting those issues, and this was also a way for me to learn about the usage of autoethnography in art, even though I could not identify it as such back then, having limited understanding of autoethnography at that point. It simply came naturally to us to present not only the issues around the conflict and position of women within the society, but also our emotions. Our conversations were recorded during the interviews, which were then shortlisted and after my careful selection, included in the thesis. I also recorded the findings, discussions and conversations related to the shows, residencies, and conferences in research journals.



Figure 142: Feminist Art Colony in Sicevo, Serbia, photographs taken by members of the Centre for Girls

The following exhibitions also resulted from the cooperation or organisation with the Centre for Girls:



Figure 143: Art takes no restrictions, 2019, Exhibition of artworks made at the fifth Feminist Art Colony in Sicevo, Nis Cultural Centre, Nis, Serbia, photographs taken by members of the Centre for Girls



Figure 144: 14th PitchWise Female Art and Activism Festival, Sarajevo, Bosnia, and Herzegovina, 2020, Available at: https://www.sarajevotimes.com/opening-womens-art-activism-festival-pitchwise/



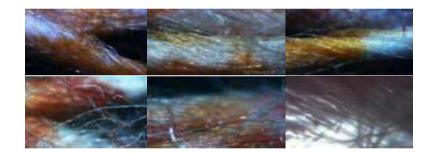
Figure 145: *The Butterfly Effect*, Exhibition of artworks made during the sixth Feminist Art Colony, 2020, Cultural Centre Leskovac, Leskovac, Serbia, photograph taken by members of *the Centre for Girls*

Using the online page *Arts Jobs*, I learnt about the exhibition space in Trondheim, Norway, and the gallery space resonated with my research, as the outline of the gallery was ideal for my intended attempt to test how photography works with the projection. The gallery had a small back room which had no windows and was perfect for the placement of a projector, while the photographs were placed in the main space which was well lit with windows and reflectors on the ceiling which could be aimed at the desired direction.

The exhibition opening was an opportunity to engage in discussions around the role of researchers in artistic research and about our different ways in which we approach the practice-based research, as it was visited by students and PhD researchers from the Trondheim Academy of Arts. For this show, I printed the greatest part of my photographs using the NTU print shop, Nottingham, which allowed me to test the samples on different types of paper they have on offer.

Ivana Puskas 25/02/2022- 27/02/2022

Chasing Ghosts 08:00pm



blunk

Figure 146: Solo exhibition Chasing Ghosts, 2022, Blunk Galleri, Trondheim, Norway

I was also invited to take part in some opportunities relevant to my practice, and the explored issues of identity and belonging, as was the case with Surface gallery. I gladly took part in that show, since it was organised alongside three other female artists who originate from different backgrounds such as Ireland, Nigeria and Hungary, but their practices revolve around conflict, belonging and identity as well. Lost Stories as a venue connected artists Arit Emmanuela Etukudo / Szilvia Ponyiczki / Ivana Puskas / Una Nic Samhradháin, who offered their visual response to the issues of identity.

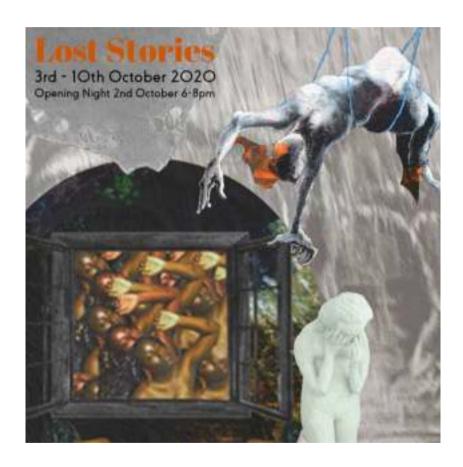


Figure 147: Lost Stories, 2020, Surface gallery, Nottingham, UK

Parts of the Surface Gallery exhibition set up, were recorded, and used in the film *Art of Oppression* which also presented my art practice, and my thoughts on my upbringing and life in ex-Yugoslavia. It is a film which showcased art practices of women from diverse backgrounds that also deal with issues of belonging. Regarding the film, I now regret not focusing only on photography, although I did show examples of my family archives and talked about them in the film. I chose to create a sculpture, and this required more time that there was. However, that trial and error was a part of my research process and for that very reason, I found participation in the mentioned calls crucial for identifying the course the research took. The film was followed by *The Art of Oppression* film screening & Talk which took place as an online New Art Exchange event on the 11th of March 2021. This documentary was funded by Arts Council England, and it was a unique opportunity for me to talk about my art practice, PhD, and my experiences of war.

The premiere of was followed by a discussion with Patricia Francis, the featured artists, and special guests. It received a Windrush Caribbean Film Festival Award in 2022.

The Art of Oppression is available to watch here. https://youtu.be/1SSpqUve434

My microscope photographs were presented during the Buffer Fringe in 2021 and are available on the Researchcatalogue. This opportunity helped me contribute to the ongoing dialogue around conflict and bring my contribution in this respect.



Figure 148: CCFT - displacement Buffer Fringe, part of a Nomadic online dialogue, 2021, Nicosia, Cyprus, Available at:

All those conversations and discussions, opportunities to show my research, allowed me to broaden my way of thinking and my practice. I understood the importance of what I am researching and tested how my art sits in gallery space and what works well and what needs improvement.

During my solo shows in Norway, I experienced the issue of how to best present the photographs in the gallery space, as there was no accompanying narrative. This made me wonder how clear the intention and the goal of the exhibition would be to the audience. I included a page of text to accompany the exhibition, but the images were to speak for themselves and my special concern in this respect, were microscope photographs which seemed a bit abstract when detached from the written narrative.

This is one of the issues that Mary Kelly (1983) also recognised stating that her goal was to avoid pulling the visible into the readable and setting the opposition between the text and the image. The challenge for her as well was how to make sure that the text-based forms of representation that accompany the artistic output work well to the artwork and whether these two narratives speak to each other (Kelly 1983). I had the same issue with presenting the visual narrative without the written narrative. However, I did add the name of photographs which clarified microscope photographs and tried to put them on the gallery wall according to the themes. For example, I put the microscope photographs of my grandad's uniform on the same wall as the photographs from the factory related to his work, which I retrieved from the family archives.

This seemed to work satisfactory, however, I was still questioning whether that solution was appropriate only for me, as the connections between these different types of photographs are evident to me, regardless of their position in the gallery space. This is one point to further develop in the future and look for alternative ways to address this. Projection seemed to be the best course in this respect, but this point remains somewhat unresolved and will be dealt with in the next stages of my research.

6. CONCLUSION

This research situates and presents my history within the Yugoslav context I grew up in, but also presents loss and melancholy, and this fact is most evident in the result of my practice- based research and visual photographic narrative, to which all four developed types of photographs are equally crucial: 1. microscope photographs, 2. autoethnographic photographs of sites and objects, 3. family archival photographs, sourced from my personal family archives and 4. archival photographs sourced from the Ruma County Museum in Serbia.

As a result of practice- based photographic research, these four types of photographs visually investigated and presented my testimony of the experience of Yugoslavia.

My work with the photographs which originate from my personal family archives, brought me closer to the ghosts of the past times, closer to my family members some of whom I had never met in real life and those who I knew as a child and whose lives remained a mystery to me in certain aspects. Using photography, as the central element of practice-based research, brought me closer to the embodied life, their destinies and allowed an insight into them. Further photographic investigation led me to a clearer understanding of the Yugoslav society and the political circumstances which influenced their lives. My work with the archival material gave me an insight into such multi-layered, embodied life, and the photographic material served as a visual narrative which allowed meaning making and emotional expression, much more relevant for this research than pure informing, evidence, and documentation. This visual research also allowed me to distinguish social from individual aspects of autoethnography as a research method, while at the same time the destinies of these people and my own destiny in Yugoslavia, allowed me to reach a deeper social understanding.

Working with museum archives in my hometown, Ruma helped me to identify a serious gap in knowledge and this became evident once I realised that there is almost nothing written about the conflict in Yugoslavia in relation to my town Ruma, Serbia. In the Ruma County Museum I found a significant amount of photographic material without a story to complement it. This rich photographic visual material had no verbal explanation and there was limited information on dates, people, events, and places. Therefore, I recognised the need for this story to be written.

Another limiting factor to the thorough understanding of the circumstances surrounding life in and after Yugoslavia is that the people who once evidenced and researched Yugoslavia are slowly disappearing, and during my research, I met the same obstacle more than once. This fact itself testifies of the relevance of this research. As a witness I have given my contribution to preserving this memory. This fact gives me a personal consolation for although I could not influence the dissolution of my country and tragedies surrounding it, I could give my contribution to saving it from oblivion by offering my personal written and visual narrative of my experiences of Yugoslavia.

This research allowed me to generate artworks in relation to complex issues of war, loss, identity and belonging, arising from the specificity of the Yugoslav social context that I experienced, and to develop a photographic body of work which brings a unique new knowledge and aesthetic value to this research. As a witness, I have given my contribution to preserving this memory through writing and as an art practitioner, I have added to the visual contribution in this sense. This fact gives me a personal consolation, for although I could not influence the dissolution of my country and tragedies surrounding it, I gave my contribution to saving certain aspects of it from oblivion, by offering my personal written and visual narrative of my experiences of Yugoslavia.

In addition to that, I have depicted my emotional response to what Yugoslavia once was for me, and this unique creative input, gives a fresh view to my chosen subject matter, through the artistic medium of microscope photography. Using a microscope, I have given colour to my memories and emotions of sadness, loss, disappointment, guilt, and anger. Furthermore, via microscope photography, I also expressed devotion and love to my deceased and displaced family members and the joy and happiness of having once belonged to Yugoslavia.

Via field trips to ex-Yugoslav countries: Croatia, Serbia, and Macedonia, using site-writing and sites as a source of associations to compose a personal narrative, I created a new body of visual and written knowledge but also used my hometown to present a unique micro cosmos which depicted circumstances of life in Yugoslavia before and after its dissolution. Field trips also allowed me to test the quality of my own memories and to offer a temporal distance in understanding of the events connected to these specific places.

Writing a native account as an insider, meant seeing my own horror and giving it shape using words, while at the same time seeing the same horror in my closest friends and the society in which we were raised. In relation to this, the notion of "home' is never a tangible one and as a person and an auto ethnographer, I never feel quite at home. What I and my family and friends have in common are our collective memories, and this same black ghost of collective trauma. In relation to this, my stance on the ethical question around speaking for the other is that a person without this ghost inside, cannot write an auto ethnography on war, and in my opinion, the importance of a native account is the most evident in this respect.

Writing autoethnography felt deeply genuine and natural, both in terms of content and the research question I aimed to explore. In addition to this, subjectivity proved crucial for presenting my female version of the events surrounding the dissolution of Yugoslavia, and this personal female narrative being emotional, subjective, and feminine, offers a counter perspective to the prevailing narratives of Yugoslavia. Therefore, both the narrative and practice, contribute to the representation of conflict, and to the developing female voice of artists and pacifists in the contemporary art.

Contribution to knowledge of this research is therefore evident through the story-telling feature and the personal narrative related to what Yugoslavia once was and innovation is embedded in creative practice and the photographic practice-based work.

Photography as a visual narrative brings a contribution to preserve a memory of Yugoslavia and all four types of photographs employed in this research visually explore the complex issues of identity, loss and belonging.

I framed the narrative and photographic practice mostly around Ruma, Serbia, and used it as a metaphor of life and society during and after Yugoslavia. While working with archival photography from Ruma County Museum, I did not find any textual material to accompany these photographs, and I realised how big of a gap this was, and that the contribution to knowledge of this research lies in this narrative. In that sense, my personal narrative also offered a correspondence to the gathered archival photography which presented evidence to justify my memories of Yugoslavia.

Contribution here also lies in exploring the use of microscope photography and developing further means of employing it in practice-based research. Using microscope photography, I focused on how deep it is possible to dive within a single artistic discipline and present the issues of identity, loss and belonging in their core, including the elements invisible to the human eye. The contribution here lies in presenting the invisible and enable presence to the seemingly absent, to test the boundaries of our senses and use photography to tell a story of otherwise unspeakable aspects of human life.

In addition, the contribution to new knowledge lies in capturing my own memories, through narrative and practice, and saving them from the danger of their disappearance, for even though what once was, can no longer return and be corrected, it was my intention to go back to the past and resurrect it from oblivion. Autoethnography as chosen methodology, allowed me to closely narrate my experiences of traumas related to the loss of my country, its values and the people close to me, while at the same time, this gift of my living testimony brings a unique contribution to knowledge and is a means of preserving memories of everything Yugoslavia once stood for and represented to the people around me and me personally.

It is my intention to continue pursuing the work around the intersection between art and autoethnography in order to continue further developing these two disciplines in my future academic endeavours. I am particularly interested in ways in which I can use the medium of microscope photography in a much broader context to test the new ways in which I can present autoethnography in practice-based research.

At the same time, I feel that this PhD is only the start of a much bigger research, and that it is much more important than being reduced to simply one individual narrative. It outgrows me as an individual, for there are so many more stories to be told in relation to what Yugoslavia once was and what it represented. Photographic visual narrative is set to start further dialogues and investigation into the life that is to be grasped from oblivion. The approach chosen within this research, is a mere beginning of a further investigation, and I feel as if I had only scratched the surface. I hope that, while understanding that as a researcher, I am only a pure medium through which these stories flow, I will continue giving my humble contribution to preserve these memories, in the best possible form, in my future academic endeavours.

References:

Artbrut, 2023. AFTERMATH. Changing Cultural Landscape Tendencies of engaged post-Yugoslav contemporary photography [online], Available at: https://aftermathsee.wordpress.com/artists/ivan-petrovic/, [Accessed 4th April 2023].

Arendt, H., 1970. Men in dark times. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt.

Artbrut, 2023. Danijel Savovic, Artbrut [online], Available at https://www.artbrutserbia.com/danijel-savović: [Accessed 4th April 2023].

Assman J. and Czaplick J., 1995. Collective Memory and Cultural Identity. New German Critique, No. 65, Cultural History/ Cultural Studies.

Avgita, L., 2012. *Marina Abramovic's universe: universalizing the particular in Balkan Epic*, from the Cultural Policy, Criticism and Management Research, City University London.

Baer, U., 2002. Spectral Evidence: The Photography of Trauma, MIT Press.

Baric, A., 2020. What the end of Yugoslavia taught me about belonging. *The Calvert Journal*. Available at: https://www.calvertjournal.com/articles/show/11883/yugoslavia-wars-belonging-personal-essay-family-croatia [Accessed 12th June, 2019].

Barthes, R.,1980. Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography. New York: Hill and Wang.

Bartleet, B., 2021. *Artistic Autoethnography, Exploring the Interface Between Autoethnography and Artistic Research*, Handbook on Autoethnography, 2nd edition, Routledge, 2021, pp. 133-145.

Batinic, J., 2001. Feminism, Nationalism, and War: The 'Yugoslav Case' in Feminist Texts. Journal of International Women's Studies, 3(1), 1-23.

Batinic, S., Radeka, I. and Susnjara, S., 2016. *Today, as I become a Pioneer ...: education in the spirit of socialism.* Newspaper *HISTORIA SCHOLASTICA* 1/2016, Prague, ISSN 2336-680X.

Benjamin, W., 1931. Little History of Photography, Selected Writings, Volume 2, Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press.

Benjamin, W., 1974. On the Concept of History, Gesammelte Schriften I:2, Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag.

Benjamin, W., 1932. Selected Writings, Volume 2, part 2 (1931–1934), *Ibizan Sequence*, 1932, ed. by Marcus Paul Bullock, Michael William Jennings, Howard Eiland, and Gary Smith, Cambridge, Mass: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press.

Benjamin, W., 1934. The Author as Producer, Selected Writings, Volume 2, Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1999.

Benjamin, W., 1955. *The Storyteller*, from Hale, Dorothy J, Ed. *The Novel: An Anthology of Criticism and Theory* 1900-2000. Malden, Mass.: Blackwell Publishing, 2006.

Belgradedesignweek, 2019. Djordje Ozbolt's project Regaining Memory Loss. *Belgradedesignweek* [online] Available at: http://www.belgradedesignweek.com/project/djordje-ozbolts-project-regaining-memory-loss-represents-serbia-at-the-58th-international-art-biennale-in-venice/ [Accessed 2nd April 2020].

Blair, Carole, Brown, Julie R. and Baxter, Leslie A.,1994. Disciplining the feminine. Quarterly Journal of Speech, 80(4), 383-409. DOI: 10.1080/00335639409384084

Botev, N., 1994. Where East Meets West: Ethnic Intermarriage in the Former Yugoslavia, 1962 to 1989. American Sociological Review, Vol. 59, No. 3, pp. 461- 480, American Sociological Association.

Boym, S., 2001. The Future of Nostalgia, Basic Books, New York.

Braga, L. Mello, and M. Fiks, J., 2012. Transgenerational transmission of trauma and resilience: a qualitative study with Brazilian offspring of Holocaust survivors. *BMC Psychiatry*. doi.org/10.1186/1471-244X-12-134.

Bunch, C., 2006. Feminism, Peace, Human Rights. "Women and Peace Panel" Women, Peace Building and Constitution-Making International Conference, Colombo, Sri Lanka.

Candy, L. and Edmonds, E., 2018. Practice-Based Research in the Creative Arts: Foundations and Futures from the Front Line. *Leonardo*, Volume 51, Issue 1.

Chang, H., 2008. Autoethnography as Method. Bibliovault OAI Repository, the University of Chicago Press.

Chang, H., Ngunjiri and F.Hernandez, A., 2010. Collaborative Autoethnography. Journal of Research Practice, Volume 6, Issue 1, Article E1.

Clandinin, D. J. and Connelly, F. M., 1990. Stories of Experience and Narrative Inquiry. Educational Researcher, Vol. 19, No. 5, pp 2-14.

Confino, B., 2016. Collage and the Photographic Imagination, Available at: https://www.icp.org/perspective/collage-and-the-photographic-imagination [Accessed 20th November 2023].

Custer, D., 2014. Autoethnography as a Transformative Research Method. *The Qualitative Report 2014*, Volume 19 (37), 1-13. Available at https://nsuworks.nova.edu/tgr/vol19/iss37/3 [Accessed 20th July 2020].

Cvjetic, D., 2017. Gentlemen, is this war? *Dnevnik* [online], 9th December. Available at: https://www.slobodnaevropa.org/a/dnevnik-darko-cvijetic/28904902.html [Accessed 22nd September 2020].

Daalder, I. and O'hanlon, M., 2000. Winning Ugly, NATO's War to Save Kosovo, Brookings Institution Press.

DanOnline, 2018. Parce istorije sa srebrnim vijencem pet eura. *DanOnline* [online], 6th May 2018. Available at https://www.dan.co.me/?nivo=3&rubrika=Podgoricom&clanak=645183&datum=2018-05-06 [Accessed 5th March 2020].

Diab, S., 2017. Writing gown: the challenges of making a new artwork about sexism within academia. [online], Available at: https://cris.brighton.ac.uk/ws/portal/iles/portal/441383/WritingGownSDiabRevised+%281%29.pdf [Accessed 15th October 2023].

Diab, S. and Moriarty, J., 2019. The art of hula Collaborative and embodied arts-based research as a way of moving through academic life. In: Moriarty, J., Autoethnographies *from the Neoliberal Academy,* Routledge, UK, 2019, pp. 168-187.

Dijanic, D. Golubic and M. Niemcic, I., 2004. Female Biographical Lexicon. Zagreb: Centar za zenske studije.

Dimitrijevic, Z., 2009. Warmth of a National Thing (On Zoran Todorović's project for the Venice Biennial, 2009) [online] Available at: https://www.academia.edu/9874987/Warmth_of_a_National_Thing_On_Zoran_Todorovićs_project_for_the_Venice_Biennial_2009_, [Accessed 19th October 2023]

Doherty, K. and Eaton, G., 2007. A review of research and methods used to establish art therapy as an effective treatment method for traumatized. State University of New York College at Cortland, Cortland: Elsevier Inc.

Dragovic, R., 2011. Srpski orden na ruskim grudima. *Novosti* [online], 6th April. Available at: https://www.novosti.rs/vesti/naslovna/aktuelno.293.html:325958-Srpski-orden-na-ruskim-grudima [Accessed 2nd April 2020].

Drakulic, S. and Licht, S., 1996. When the Word for Peacemaker was a Woman: War and Gender in the Former Yugoslavia. *Research on Russia and Eastern Europe*, Volume 2, pages 111-139. Copyright @ 1996 by JAI Press Inc. Belgrade: Center for Women's Studies. Available at: https://www.zenskestudie.edu.rs/en/publishing/online-material/women-s-studies-journal/296-when-the-word-for-peacemaker-was-a-woman-war-and-gender-in-the-former-yugoslavia [Accessed 15th June, 2019].

Duncan, M., 2004. Autoethnography: Critical appreciation of an emerging art. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, *3*(4), Article 3. Available at: http://www.ualberta.ca/~iiqm/backissues/3 4/html/duncan.html [Accessed 13th March 2020].

Edkins, J., 2003. Trauma and the Memory of Politics, Cambridge Cambridge: University Press.

Eisner, E., 1991. The enlightened eye: Qualitative inquiry and the enhancement of educational practice. New York: Macmillan.

Ellis, C. and Bochner, A., 2006. Analyzing Analytic Autoethnography an Autopsy. *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, Volume 35 Number 4 August 2006 429-449 © 2006 Sage Publications.

Ellis, C. and Bochner, A., 2011. *Autoethnography: An Overview.* Forum Qualitative sozialforschung / Institute for Qualitative Research, Freie University, Berlin.

Ellis C., 2000. Creating Criteria: An Ethnographic Short Story. Qualitative Inquiry, Volume 6 Number 2, 273-277 © 2000 Sage Publications, Inc.

Ellis, C., 2009. Revision: Autoethnographic reflections on life and work. CA, Left Coast: Walnut Creek.

Ellis, C., 2007. Telling Secrets, Revealing Lives: Relational Ethics in Research With Intimate Others. *Qualitative Inquiry*. 2007;13(1):3-29. doi:10.1177/1077800406294947

Enrico, 2011. Rasa Todosijevic: Light and Darkness of Symbols. Serbian Pavilion at Venice Art Biennale 2011, [online] Available at: https://vernissage.tv/2011/10/10/rasa-todosijevic-light-and-darkness-of-symbols-serbian-pavilion-at-venice-art-biennale-2011/

Eril, A. and Nünning A., 2008. Cultural Memory Studies: An International and Interdisciplinary Handbook, Gruyter, Inc. Berlin.

Gerge A. and Pedersen I., 2017. Analysing pictorial artifacts from psychotherapy and art therapy when overcoming stress and trauma. *The Arts in Psychotherapy*, Volume 54. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.aip.2017.02.00.

Giller, E., 1999. What is psychological trauma? Maryland: Sidran Institute.

Goodreads, 2020. *Uterus Effect*, [online], Verein Kustentropie, Available at: https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/56889066-uterus-effects [Accessed 25nd September 2021].

Gray, C. and Malins J., 1993. Research Procedures / Methodology for Artists & Designers. Aberdeen: The Centre for Research in Art & Design, Gray's School of Art, Faculty of Design, The Robert Gordon University.

Grdesic, M., 2008. Workers and Unions after Yu, Mapping the Paths of the Yugoslav Model: Labour Strength and Weakness in Slovenia, Croatia and Serbia. *European Journal of Industrial Relations*.

Gvero, V., 2017. The Death of a Nation. *Happening Media* [online], 7th August. Available at: https://www.happening.media/category/magazine/en/articles/2930/the-death-of-a-nation-the-serbian-pavilion-in-venice [Accessed 4th April 2020].

Hanon, A., 2019. My Mother and the Failed Experiment of Yugoslavia. *The New Yorker*. Available at: https://www.newyorker.com/culture/personal-history/my-mother-and-the-failed-experiment-of-yugoslavia [Accessed 10th June 2019].

Hirschberger, G., 2018. Collective Trauma and the Social Construction of Meaning. Frontiers in Psychology; 9:1441. DOI: 10.3389/fpsyg.2018.01441.

Hitchcock, G. and Hughes, D., 1995. Research and the teacher. (2 ed.) London: Routledge.

Hodzic, S., 2020. *On The Armoire/Against Purity.* [online] Available at: https://thedisorderofthings.com/2020/07/15/on-the-armoire-against-purity/?fbclid=lwAR3Tzquwsqa4LHI5YFZNXF4RpIMJGoro2Nxs34XdUNrEhBDmUuYkxqE5Eas#more-18011 [Accessed 26th September, 2020].

Hoggard, L., 2009. How high is your resilience quotient? London Evening Standard.

Hoxha, E., 1978. Yugoslav Self-Administration- Capitalist theory and practice. Tirana: Institute of Marxist- Leninist studies of the Central Committee of the party of Labour of Albania.

Hunt, N and Evans, D. 2004. Predicting traumatic stress using emotional intelligence. American Psychological Association.

Joksic, D., 2016. *Prodavnica tuznih uspomena i propalih ideala*. Telegraf [online], 21st September. Available at: https://www.telegraf.rs/vesti/2366328-prodavnica-tuznih-uspomena-i-propalih-ideala-zar-je-ovo-sve-sto-nam-je-ostalo-od-nekadasnjeg-bratstva-i-jedinstva-foto [Accessed 10th December 2019].

Kalmanowitz, D., 2016. Inhabited Studio: Art therapy and mindfulness, resilience, adversity and refugees. *International Journal of Art Therapy, 21*(2), 75–84. doi.org/10.1080/17454832.2016.1170053

Kelly, M. 1983. Postpartum Document, Routledge, London.

King, J. L., 2016. Art Therapy, Trauma, and Neuroscience: Theoretical and Practical Perspectives, Routledge.

King, S., 2019. The Painter Djordje Ozbolt is Showing Us How to Regain Memory Loss. *Interviewmagazine* [online], 6th March. Available at: https://www.interviewmagazine.com/art/painter-djordje-ozbolt-tells-scott-king-how-he-plans-to-attack-unreliable-memories-with-the-canvas [Accessed 28th September, 2020].

Kojic, Mladenov, S., 2011. *Biennale di Venezia-54th International Art Exhibition, Pavilion of Serbia- Interview "Line Magazine"* Available at: https://sanjakm.blogspot.com/2011/08/la-biennale-di-venezia-54th.html, [Accessed 30th September, 2020].

Kokosar, Lj., 2012. Orders. Ljubo's Insignias Page [online], 10th August. Available at: http://kokosar.com/JNA-ordeni.htm [Accessed 2nd April 2020].

Korac, M., 2016. *Is there a right time for gender-just peace?* Feminist anti-war organising revisited, Gender and Education, 28:3, 431-444, DOI: 10.1080/09540253.2016.1169252

Krstic, K., 2018. *Group of Six Artists*. Courage Registry. doi: 10.24389/9511. Available at: http://cultural-opposition.eu/registry/?uri=http://courage.btk.mta.hu/courage/individual/n95117 [Accessed 29th November 2020].

LaCapra, D., 2001. Writing History, Writing Trauma, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press

Laslett, B., 1999. Personal Narratives as Sociology. *Contemporary Sociology*, 28(4), 391-401. Available at: http://www.jstor.org/stable/2655287 [Accessed 1st December 2020].

Lee, T., 2012. Resilience as a Positive Youth Development Construct: A Conceptual Review. Scientific World Journal.

Licht, S. and Drakulic, S., 2018. When the word for a peacemaker was a woman: War and Gender in the Former Yugoslavia, In: B. Wejnert, M. Spencer and S, Drakulic, eds. Women in Post-Communism, Research on Russia and Eastern Europe. Vol. II (Greenwich, CT: JAI Press), p. 111-140.

Mackenzie, P., 2017. *The Cult of Tito*. [online]. Medium. Available at: https://medium.com/@_lommol_/the-cult-of-tito-8907a0b4ff28, [Accessed 10th November 2020].

Makdisi, J., S., 2008. War and Peace: Reflections of a Feminist, Feminist Review, No. 88, War pp. 99-110, Palgrave Macmillan Journals

Manatakis, L., 2018. The Radical Creatives Who Defined the Yugoslav Art Scene. *Dazed,* [online] Available at: https://www.dazeddigital.com/art-photography/article/39138/1/the-radical-creatives-who-defined-the-former-yugoslavian-art-scene [Accessed 5th March 2020].

Martin, N., 2012. The Rose of No Man 's Land [?]': Femininity, Female Identity, and Women on the Western Front. *The Journal of International Women's Studies*, Bridgewater State University, MA, USA.

Martinjanda, 2011. *Milena Dragicevic: Erections for Transatlantica* [online]. Martinjanda. Available at: https://www.martinjanda.at/en/exhibitions/2011/1/124/milena-dragicevic-erections-for-transatlantica/, [Accessed 4th April 2020].

Membrana, 2017. Ivan Petrovic: Available at: https://www.membrana.org/contributor/ivan-petrovic/, [Accessed 4th November 2023].

McIntyre, C., 2014. Visual Alchemy, The Fine Art of Digital Montage, Focal Press, Taylor & Francis Group, Burlington.

McKinnon, S., 2013. Text-Based Approaches to Qualitative Research, An Overview of Methods, Process, and Ethics, in a book International Encyclopaedia of Media Studies, Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell.

Mendez, M., 2013. Autoethnography as a research method: Advantages, limitations and criticisms. *Colombian applied linguistics journal* 15.2 (2013): 279-287.

Michel, K., 2011. The Complete Guide to Altered Imagery: Mixed-Media Techniques for Collage, Altered Books, Artist Journals, and More. United States: Quarry Books.

Mihaljinac, N., 2016. *Svedocenje i reprezentacija traume u vizuelnim umetnostima: NATO bombardovanje SR Jugoslavije*, [online]. Ph.D. thesis, University of Arts in Belgrade, Available at: https://pdfcoffee.com/nina-mihaljinac-doktorska-disertacija-pdf-free.html, [Accessed 4th October 2023].

Moma, 2022. Marina Abramovic. Balkan Baroque.1997. [online] *Moma.* Available at https://www.moma.org/audio/playlist/243/3126 [Accessed June 10th 2022].

Niedderer, K., 2007. The Role and use of Creative Practice in Research and its Contribution to Knowledge. University College for the Creative Arts, at Canterbury, Epsom, Farnham, Maidstone and Rochester, UK.

Nisavic, D., 2018. Bitter memory of 1994 Hyperinflation, Serbia. *Blic* [online] 5th January. Available at: https://images.app.goo.gl/GRUTxAWzwVDkDKX7A [Accessed 10th November 2020].

Nora, P., 1989. Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Memoire. *Representations*, No.26, Special Issue: Memory and Counter-Memory, University of California Press.

Olin, M., 2002. *Touching Photographs: Roland Barthes's "Mistaken" Identification*. Representations 80 (1): 99–118. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1525/rep.2002.80.1.99 [Accessed 2nd April 2020].

Pantelic, I., et al., 2011. Yugoslav Feminisms. Profemina, Zuhra, Belgrade.

Papic, Z., 1994. Nationalism, patriarchy and war in ex-Yugoslavia, *Women's History Review*, [online], 3:1, 115-117, Available at: DOI: 10.1080/09612029400200048, [Accessed 12th November 2020].

Paunovic, M., 2015. People fighting for bread, Hyper-inflation-sanctions, 1994 Serbia. *Telegraf* [online], Available at: http://www.telegraf.rs/vesti/politika/1777443-bilo-je-to-vreme-kada-su-se-srbi-tukli-za-veknu-hleba-secate-li-se-strasnih-sankcija-evo-kako-smo-preziveli-video [Accessed 10th November 2020].

Phaindon, 2011. Inside the Mind of Milena Dragicevic. *Phaidon* [online], Available at: https://uk.phaidon.com/agenda/art/articles/2011/november/14/inside-the-mind-of-milena-dragicevic [Accessed 4th April 2020].

Potter, M., 2010. Zoran Todorovic by Melissa Potter, *Bomb Magazine* [online], Available at: https://bombmagazine.org/articles/zoran-todorovic/ [Accessed 10th October 2023].

Poznanovic, D., 1978. Pocelo je u crvenom kuticu. Sremske Novine, Ruma.

Pratt, M., 2003. Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation. New York and London: Taylor and Francis Group, Routledge.

Radiosarajevo.ba, 2017. Na Golom otoku atmosfera je I dalje jeziva. *Radiosarajevo.ba* [online], 5 September. Available at:https://radiosarajevo.ba/magazin/zanimljivosti/na-golom-otoku-atmosfera-je-i-dalje-jeziva/273707 [Accessed 22nd April 2019].

Reed-Danahay, D. E., 1997. Auto/ethnography: Rewriting the self and the social. Oxford, UK: Berg.

Rendell, J., 2001. Conductor: a tribute to the angels, Jane Prophet: 'Conductor', by The Wapping Project, London. Available at: https://site-writing.co.uk/ [Accessed March 13th 2020].

Rendell, J., 2004. Letting Go, Available at: https://site-writing.co.uk/ [Accessed March 16th 2020].

Rendell, J., 2003. Everywhere Else, Available at: https://site-writing.co.uk/ [Accessed March 16th 2020].

Rendell, J., 2001. Longing for the Lightness of Spring. The Wapping Project, London. Available at: https://site-writing.co.uk/ [Accessed March 13th 2020].

Rendell, J., 2008. *Paradise Lost (and Regained)* text published in the catalogue for Rosa Nguyen, Petites Terres, 15 June – 15 August 2008, Barthete, France. Available at: https://site-writing.co.uk/ [Accessed March 13th 2020].

Rendell, J., 2019. Site Writing. [online]. Available at: https://site-writing.co.uk/ [Accessed March 13th 2020].

Richards, M., 2008. Specular Suffering: (Staging) the Bleeding Body. *PAJ: A Journal of Performance and Art*, 30(1), 108–119. [online], Available at: http://www.jstor.org/stable/30131077 [Accessed 19th October 2023].

Richardson, L., 2000. Evaluating Ethnography. Qualitative Enquiry. https://doi.org/10.1177%2F107780040000600207

Robertson J., 2017. The Life and Death of Yugoslav Socialism. New York: Jacobin.

Ross, L., 2013. *Ritual, Repetition, Mourning. Part 2.* [online]. Dilettante Army, *Available* at: http://www.dilettantearmy.com/articles/ritual-repetition-mourning-part-1 [Accessed May 15th 2020].

Ross, M., 2018. We Tanjas the Lexicon of Tanjas Ostojic and the history of Yugoslavia. *Artblog* [online blog], 31st January. Available at: https://www.theartblog.org/2018/01/we-tanjas-the-lexicon-of-tanjas-ostojic-and-the-history-of-yugoslavia/ [Accessed, 12th February 2019].

Russel, T., 1998. Autoethnography: Journeys of the self. *Experimental Ethnography*. Available at: http://www.haussite.net/haus.0/SCRIPT/txt2001/01/russel.html [Accessed 10th May 2019].

Sanna J. L. and Chang C. E., 2006. Judgments over Time: The Interplay of Thoughts, Feelings, and Behaviours. Oxford University Press; 1 edition.

Scher, B., 2013. *Women, art and war.* [online], Ph.D. thesis, University at Albany. Available at: https://search.proquest.com/docview/1524259818?pq-origsite=gscholar, [Accessed, 16th February 2019].

Sekula, A., 1986. The Body and the Archive, *October*, [online], Vol. 39, pp. 3-64, The MIT Press Available at: https://www.jstor.org/stable/778312, [Accessed 12th November 2020].

Siljegovic, B. and Todorovic, V., 1985. Military Encyclopaedia, Belgrade.

Sindikat, 2011. *Iz istorije sindikalnog pokreta.* [online]. Sindikat. Available at: https://web.archive.org/web/20110808025408/http://www.sindikat.rs/istorijat.htm, [Accessed 30th November 2020].

Skains, R. L., 2018. Creative practice as research: discourse on methodology. Media Practice and Education 19.1 (2018): 82-97.

Smith, M. R., 2014. Family Photography and the Documentation of Trauma in Contemporary Art, *Studies in Visual Arts and Communication: an international journal*, [online]. Vol 1, No 1, Available at: https://journalonarts.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/SVACij-Vol1_No1_2014-SMITH_Matthew_Ryan-Docum-of-Trauma-in-Contemp-Art.pdf, [Accessed 20th November 2020].

Spahic, A., Zdralovic A. and Aganovic, A., 2014. Women and Public Life of 20th century Bosnia and Herzegovina. Sarajevo: Sarajevo Open Centre.

Sparkes, A. C., 2000. Autoethnography and narratives of self: Reflections on criteria in action. *Sociology of Sport Journal*, 17, 21-43. https://doi.org/10.1123/ssj.17.1.21

Spry, T., 2001. Performing autoethnography: An embodied methodological praxis. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 7(6), 706-732. doi: 10.1177/107780040100700605.

Stockton, R., 2019. Meet the Ustase, The Brutal Nazi Allies Even Hitler Couldn't Control [online]. *ATI.* Available at: https://allthatsinteresting.com/ustase [Accessed on 18th November 2020].

Stokic, J., 2004. Performative bodies: Serbian female artists in post-modernist self-identity in the works of Marina Abramovic and Tanja Ostojic. *Serbian Studies* Vol. 18, Issue 2. Available at: link.gale.com/apps/doc/A251858390/AONE?u=anon~4546efe9&sid=bookmark-AONE&xid=e1702496 [Accessed 8 July 2022].

Tickner, J., A., 1993. Feminist Approaches to Issues of War and Peace, 25 Stud. Transnat'l Legal Pol'y 267

Theveniceinsider, 2017. Lost and Found, *Theveniceinsider*, [online] Available at: https://www.theveniceinsider.com/art-biennale-2017-kosovo/[Accessed 12th November 2020].

Todorovic, S., 2021. "Not Welcome!": Migrants and Refugees labelled as undesirable in Serbia. Available at: https://www.media-diversity.org/not-welcome-migrants-and-refugees-labeled-as-undesirable-in-serbia/ [Accessed 10th January 2023].

Van der Hart, Brown and Van der Kolk, 1989. Pierre Janet's Treatment of post-traumatic stress disorder. *Journal of Traumatic Stress*, 2, 379-395. Available at: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/226134094 Janet%27s treatment of post-traumatic Stress [Accessed 16th May 2020].

Vidovic, T., 2019. "Brain Drain" and Serbia: How to keep them? Danas [online], 10th September. Available at: https://www.danas.rs/drustvo/odliv-mozgova-i-srbija-kako-ih-zadrzati/ (Accessed 10th November 2020).

Vuckovic, Z., 2019. *Instead of professionalism, political party employment*. Available at: https://www.slobodnaevropa.org/a/29918970.html [Accessed 10th November 2020].

Vujadinovic, D., 2001. Obstacles and prospects of development of civil society in Federal Republic of Yugoslavia in Spasić, I, Subotić, M., 2001. Revolution and Order, Belgrade: Institute for Philosophy and Social Theory, Library Disput.

Wall, S., 2008. Easier Said than Done: Writing an Autoethnography. International Journal of Qualitative Methods.

Womeninblack, 2023. Women in black for justice, against war, *Womeninblack*, [online], Available at: https://womeninblack.org/ [Accessed 12th November 2023].

Yin, R. K., 2002. Case study research: Design and methods. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.

Yurchak, A., 2005. Everything Was Forever, Until It Was No More: The Last Soviet Generation. Princeton University Press.

Zdjelar, K. and Stojanovic, B., 2009. Katarina Zdjelar: But if you take my voice, what will be left to me? Ali ako mi oduzmeš glas, šta mi ostaje? Museum of Contemporary Art, Belgrade, Serbia.

Zizek, S., 2002. For They Know Not What They Do: Enjoyment as a Political Factor. Verso, London, ISBN, 185984460X, 9781859844601.

APPENDIX

Interview Transcripts:

The following two interviews were conducted during the fifth Feminist Art Colony, Sicevo, Serbia in 2019.

Interview with Sanja Solunac, artist at the fifth *Feminist Art Colony*, Sicevo, Serbia, in 2019, who graduated from the School of Applied Arts at the Faculty of Philology and Arts, University of Kragujevac. She uses art to respond to the questions of trauma by investigating its healing process in order to support the victims of war.

I: Can you tell me something about your artworks?

S: I am an interdisciplinary artist whose main topics are gender, class, and feminism and these are the prevailing themes in my artworks. I have done projects with various groups and participated in support work with women who were victims of sexual violence in war. I did projects that relate to sensitive female issues.

With my colleague from the university, I did a series of projects related to feminism as a theme in visual art and after a while, we created a magazine about female and feminist art. There were only three issues in Kragujevac, Serbia. That web page is still active, and we post news about projects and female festivals to share information. We also support each other by sharing open calls, funding opportunities etc. Even today we have colleagues around Europe who want to collaborate with us.

I: What was the technique of your early works?

S: I was interested in graphics, ink, and calligraphy.

Aside from being given an opportunity to promote feminist issues, I also offered support in the form of art therapy related to violence, having been asked by therapists whether I would participate in art therapy activities which involved women who were victims of rape in war.

I: Where were the women from?

S: First from Sarajevo, Bosnia, Croatia then Kosovo.

In the meantime, I decided to do postgraduate studies to explore feminism as a theme. During *Artfemine Festival* in Nis I met the organisers of the *Feminist Art Colony*. Tanja, one of the organisers, invited me to collaborate in a panel to talk about my artwork, and later to help the *Center for Girls* and the art colony, to empower women in terms of feminist issues and violence prevention. They did projects, were provided with funding, and after one year the first colony was organised.

At this point I am interested in economic violence against women. Female artists are present on the Serbian art scene, but feminist themes are not. It is sometimes said that these themes are trivial and thus absent, so my goal is to use art and my activism to promote themes related to violence in the art scene. Gender violence is the basis.

I: How did the cooperation with war victims further evolve?

S: As some of them were not artists, but were willing to share, they told me their stories and asked me to present them visually. That is how I started creating artworks with dresses, as one dress represented one story. I created visual narratives and related these artworks to certain women. I documented their stories alongside the paintings, for example a woman from Foca, Bosnia, 1992, was subjugated to violence, while in Prizren, Kosovo, 1999, different women survived violence. I never presented these documents in public to protect their privacy. At one point there were 27 registered cases in a town in Kosovo, but we knew there were more than 50. I was mapping these cases. The dress was a symbol. Further on, I developed this theme, and the first project was related to sexual violence in war. I had 128 women in total who arrived for counselling.

I: Were there women who wanted to express themselves visually?

S: Yes, of course. We organised an exhibition where these artworks were displayed along with my artworks, but these women wanted to stay anonymous. That was the first project I worked on for over ten years.

I: Does this counselling clinic exist still?

S: Yes, but not that actively, as most of these women moved abroad to Canada, Germany, Sweden where they got asylum.

Later, as a visual artist, I was invited to a seminar in Kosovo, Pristina, by the feminists from Sweden who were involved in researching the theme of rape as a war strategy.

This form of a dress was present in many techniques and projects. In drawings, these dresses had different symbols, some were related to female workers in left-wing systems, but they were also a critique of capitalism which exploits total female existence. Therefore, dresses relate to various themes revolving around the issues of gender, class, and violence, which originates and results from these divisions.

This cooperation with the Feminist Art Colony allowed me to differentiate various artistic contexts, tightly connected to the political nature of art, female and feminist art, and different topics, for example, an artist can be feminist, but her art does not have to be activist. These issues allowed me to gain valuable experience in terms of research. Similar experiences with female artists from previous five art colonies in Sicevo were shared, with us all being Yugoslav based, and thus raised in this environment, which influenced the way we built our identities as artists. Feminism is very important to me; our great-grandmothers could not vote or get an education therefore I am interested in these female projects. I would like my project to gain institutional support so that my case study allows a production of a sort of encyclopaedia about feminism. My MA was about women as objects in history of arts and women as subjects in art history. I would like to do a mapping of the years and social contexts in which female artists were present. Only women from the higher class were allowed to do art in the 19th century. They could travel abroad to study, so class was very important. I would also include the third wave of feminism in Serbia to the issues of violence and 21st century female issues. This type of document would be related to women artists of previous Yugoslavia. Therefore, my PhD would be based on my MA studies.

Interview with Milena Krstic, artist at the fifth *Feminist Art Colony* 2019, Sicevo, Serbia, and a PhD research student in Applied Art and Design at the Faculty of Applied Arts at the University of Belgrade, Serbia.

M: I had a lot of trouble painting my house, which was our task during a workshop we did previously. I do not have only bad memories of the house, because back then, my parents made a lot of effort so that we, children, do not feel the consequences of war, embargo, and restrictions. They made us feel like things were normal. My dad would bring us a kinder egg from work in a café, every day. That was rare because most people could not afford it.

My most painful memory is that of my mum getting a phone call about my dad being taken to war in Vukovar, Croatia. I do not divide people by nationality, but I always felt a sense of guilt towards the people in Croatia.

I: He had no choice.

M: The first time they recruited him, but the second time he went voluntarily because he was brainwashed there. He told us that he was going to Belgrade to buy cigarettes, but his uniform was waiting for him there. After that, he sent us a postcard from Soko Banja, Serbia, where he went to recover from war, and all that was so hard for me, and I am still angry at him. Although he was trying so hard, selling fuel on the blackmarket during embargo, I always remember my mum who tried to be strong for us. We did not have a washing machine and she would hand wash all our clothes. It was very hard and very stressful. I would not want to know what happened there, in the war zone, because then I think

about all the suffering in war on both sides. I think that my dad might have killed someone and for me that is a terrible realisation. He still has nightmares. He went to therapy, but he never really got support. He was a member of the Society for Veterans, they supported families, women whose husbands died. We would go there with our mum because one parent in the family could get humanitarian aid. There was an occasion when, for some holiday, they gave 20 dollars to us children. Americans. What did they want to redeem with 20 dollars? Our best man lost his eye in war, and he was very young. All those men are suffering even today, unemployed, because they do not want to risk losing that small pension they are receiving as veterans.

I also remember soldiers who were sleeping in our basement. They were separated from their families. My dad helped refugees from Croatia a lot, because their camp was next to the café where he worked. I remember how my dad got disappointed when he saw one man selling at the market the clothes my dad gave to the man's family to aid them. They had no support from the government. Those were very difficult times.

I: You mentioned that you previously lived in a laundry house?

M: My dad managed to refurbish it and divide a room with a board.

I: I find it hard to believe that he went on his own that second time to war. Did he tell you who started the war?

M: I could never ask him that. All I know is what I read in the media.

He is still scared to cross the border with Croatia. I could never dare to ask him about these things. Eventually, they sued the state, and he got an apartment from the municipality, and he is supposed to pay it off. He also got compensation, the better the lawyer, the more they got. He lent all that money to someone who never repaid it. I do not regret that money, although it was a large sum, and I see it as some sort of cosmic redemption of his debt. He was wounded in war. He has one shrapnel in his arm and one in his leg, and they cannot take them out because blood might move them towards his heart. That second time they were sent somewhere as a reserve. He proudly brought photographs from war and my mum was very angry because of it. I think that we tore them up. Half of his unit died by a bomb the first time he went to war. I: Maybe that is why he went back.

M: I think that I will always feel guilt. I cannot understand how someone who gave me life could do these things.

I: Did you ever create artwork on this topic?

M: No because it was all too hard for me. Perhaps at some point. However, feminism in my artworks results from this constant struggle.

Regardless of all he did, we got everything from my dad. We would go to the seaside and go skiing. That was his way of redemption.

I: Probably also because he realised how much you mean to him.

M: He also wanted to go to Kosovo, and they told him to go home for he had repaid his debt to his country.

I: What about the Feminist Art Colony? Why is it important for you?

M: The organisers and other female participants helped me to redefine things and position my experiences. They offered me support and understanding.

I: What more can you tell me about your artwork?

M: It is about violence against women and children. They are miniature artworks from the perspective of a child, perhaps that originates from my suffering when my dad was in war, and loneliness. The drawings are a combination of acrylic, charcoal, and embroidery. The aim is to produce artworks to empower women. I have been collecting all the tickets, bus, and train tickets since I started university. I want to include them in my PhD thesis, because they tell a story about my change through the years, about fear for existential security until the period I started working. I was also doing self-portraits; the series is called *Utopia*. I used these photographs as the starting point for the embroidery. In them, I am dispersing, slowly perishing, and this shows my anxiety. Parts of the embroidery are fading as my body parts fade. I wanted my audience to relate to my artwork. My PhD will be exploring the relationship between embroidery, bus tickets and activism. I want to print the tickets first and then do embroidery. It is about my path, my development. I also want to present other women through embroidery.

The following interview was conducted with Rasa Todosijevic, Serbian artist, member of Belgrade Six and Marinela Kozelj, an artist and Todosijevic's wife in Belgrade, Serbia, 2019.

Ivana: Do you think that art today has to be political?

Rasa: It does not have to be, it depends on the context.

Louise Joséphine Bourgeois was not doing political art.

Marinela: Yes, but she was a feminist. She is connecting feminism with her individual, personal womanhood. I appreciate her for digging into her own past, expressing herself as a woman, and for her ironic attitude and fantasies with spiders. Her artworks are highly personal and complicated. There is a connection with feminism but not in the broader sense.

Marinela: Politics is just one segment; one can dedicate artworks to their own individuality.

Ivana: It is hard to detach yourself from the political situation if you have survived war. Lives of my whole generation were destroyed.

Rasa: I have always been an independent artist. I never worked in Serbia, only in England and California where I was a professor.

In Yugoslavia there was only socialist modernism at a time, some sort of a national junk. Very confusing, but a convenient atmosphere for some artists. Not for me, for I was rebellious. I first asked myself what kind of art environment I was surrounded with. What was the situation on the art scene? In the 1970's we started gathering at SKC, Student Cultural Centre in Belgrade, Serbia, and we were against everything. I travelled and worked in London, at the end of the 1960s, also Belgium and USA.

We saw that what our professors were teaching us were wrong presentations. I could not tell them that they were not informed after travelling and seeing art in real life. I realised that my professors did not know much about contemporary art.

Marinela: Marina Abramovic also has something that is purely individual, something that connects her art to her individuality.

Rasa: I have known Marina since 1965.

Ivana: Could you tell me about that Swastika artwork with tables?

Rasa: That was exhibited many times, first time in Cacak, 20, 30 times, in Zagreb, Berlin etc.

Marinela: That was in 1995, the exhibition in Cacak, Serbia.

Rasa: The name is *God Loves the Serbs*; the name is in German. The one with black tables was in 2002, during a retrospective at the Museum of Contemporary art in Belgrade.

Ivana: Did you exhibit it at Venice Biennale and why this name?

Rasa: Yes, but the name was the result of irony, and it refers to the fantasy of all the countries in general which believe that they are the heavenly people in Europe. It was taken from Germans and found on a Prussian belt. There was this saying in Berlin *Got mit uns- God is with us.* All the people from Europe believe that they are God's people. This is just an ironic framework.

Before that piece, Was ist Kunst was created, as a performance artwork where I was slapping Marinela.

Ivana: I thought that your idea was to produce a reference to the ex-Yugoslav war, in which Serbian people were shown as such.

Rasa: No, that was before the war.

Ivana: Was anything connected to our war circumstances?

Rasa: No, there were many swastikas, exhibited in Japan, Sweden, etc. I wanted to present the changing meaning of symbols. The swastika existed everywhere, in Japan, even America. With Christianity, the swastika disappeared and merged into folk culture, for example in Romanian folk costumes. After the Second World War, the symbol did not change, but our perception of it did. If you made a big red circle here, no one would react, but in Manchuria, China they would reflect on the memory of Japanese crimes in the First World War.

Ivana: Artwork depends on the context.

Rasa: In Japan, no one reacted to swastika. In Japan that symbol also means 1000, a number. In India, I found that symbol on a coffee sack as a symbol of the coffee company. The question is how one reads this symbol. It happened by chance that it coincided with war, and people connected it to the events around ex-Yugoslav war. They connected it to the idea of conflict and crimes.

Marinela: But that was happening around the 1990's. All of them were produced during the war. Even Cacak was in 1991, the first one was in Paris. Please Rasa, you need to remember all those years.

Rasa: Yes, but it is impossible, there were too many shows.

Ivana: Then it was kind of connected to the Yugoslav war, and it is normal that whoever sees the exhibition connects it with the civil war.

Rasa: My original idea was that god is always with people. In the Leopold Museum I had an exhibition with swastikas made of baths.

Ivana: How did the war influence the destruction of cultural values in Yugoslavia?

Rasa: Simply the worst qualities came to the surface.

Today we live isolated, even Marina does not visit us anymore. Marinela, why does not she want to visit us? Your friend?

Marinela: After Rasa got the Biennale award, she stopped coming to see us like some other people. The Tate gallery in London also bought the rights to *Was ist Kunst*.

Ivana: What you did in the 70's changed the art scene in Serbia. How do you feel about that?

Rasa: Yes, but the war influenced this to the point of stagnation.

Ivana: Decision as art, I can see this performance in the book you are showing me.

Rasa: Yes, it was written by a university professor in America. The performance was in 1974.

Ivana: For example, the museum of contemporary art bought the rights to Marina's performance with a donkey, and I wanted to ask you, as someone who personally knows Marina why is she not that appreciated in Serbia?

Marinela: She is also not appreciated in Montenegro.

Ivana: I understand why people who are struggling to survive see this as a reason for anger, when a museum would pay 100,000 euros for the rights to show her performance.

Rasa: There will be a retrospective exhibition next year in the Museum of Contemporary Art in Belgrade.

Ivana: Yes, I know, but the museum was closed for so long. Why did that happen?

Marinela: Because it was not invested in, it was built for a different time, in the past, and no one was taking care of it.

Ivana: I know because I belonged to this era of questionable values, national Pink TV with folk singers, the symbols of prosperity, but not culture. This was one of the reasons for revolution. My mum was one of the first Whistle blowers.

Marinela: Yes, we all went into the street on the 5th of October 2004, we managed to overthrow Milosevic, but the new politicians came to rule to finish the job of destruction of our country.

Ivana: I probably belong to ex-Yugoslavia. People ask me why I am going away when I belong in Serbia. They don't understand why I would travel to England, but I simply never felt as if I belonged anywhere.

Marinela: I felt the same as I come from a mixed marriage, but at least you have Croatian papers so you can travel.

Rasa: I still have a problem with travelling. When I was supposed to travel to London for my exhibition and heard what the visa requirements are, I decided not to go to my own opening out of protest. Why do they need to know how much money and which possessions I have? No, they do not have the right to ask.

But since 1968 I travelled many times to the UK.

Ivana: We did not need a visa to travel during Yugoslavia.

Rasa: Yes, but it was like a visa free regime and the border police would allow approximately a month or three months period of stay, according to their estimation.

Marinela: In 1990s you did not need anything; you could stay anywhere for a 3-month period.

Ivana: Yes, but in the 1990s we only wanted to survive.

Rasa: I went to Novi Sad to buy a chicken and we paid one chicken with one of my mum's pensions.

Ivana: I travelled to Venice Biennale as I was interested in contemporary art and that is where I saw your artwork *The Light and Darkness of symbols*.

Rasa: The one with swastika. Yes, that was in 2011. Ivana: Did you get an award that year for that artwork?

Rasa: Yes, I did.

Ivana: Did Marina get the award then too?

Rasa: No, that year she only participated in assisting the Montenegro exhibition with *Clear Waters of Cetinje*.

Marinela: In 1995 in the general Biennale, she won an award. Petar Cukovic chose her for a pavilion while Serbia and Montenegro were still together, but then Montenegro got crazy and expelled her and appointed Voja Stanic. After that, Celan, the art director of Biennale, invited her separately. She exhibited in the Biennale basement, but it proved perfect for her performance, and she won the Venice Biennale award that year as an independent artist.

Published Articles:

Ivana Mancic, Art Therapy: Trauma and ways of dealing with it

Trauma can be defined as a response to various incidents including accidents, natural disasters, crimes, surgeries, deaths, violent events as well as chronic or repetitive experiences such as rape, female and child abuse, neglect, violence, battering relationships and enduring deprivation. Anyhow, trauma cannot be easily explained as it involves different individual characteristics of the sufferer. In that sense it can be explained as an experience of a survivor. There are different varieties of trauma, either natural or man-made, such as war and political violence which are massive in scale and repeated while their consequences on survivors are extremely harsh. (Giller, 1999)

At this point art takes its dominant position as a possible means of representing the catastrophe. The crucial role of art in this respect is to help in overcoming the experienced trauma. In that sense art has a healing function, providing that the traumatized individual is not affected in such extent as to become completely disturbed and emotionally crippled.

Being in the mere vicinity of trauma in some individuals enhances the likeliness of producing art while being a compassionate observer might also be the moving source of art production and compassion can also play an important role as it gives distance from the traumatic event itself, yet offers enough insight for artistic creation. Understanding trauma and traumatizing experiences is a difficult task, especially if serious forms of trauma are involved. Trauma can be understood especially by people who have an enhanced sense of compassion. Empathy and compassion are the key features of understanding other people's suffering, whilst compassion involves feeling of love, the altruistic approach of the empathizer and acts of kindness. (Sinclair, 2017) In addition to this, trauma broadens the experience in terms of allowing an individual to digress from the established forms of living and narrow- mindedness thus accepting life on a higher level. This enables the deeper understanding of the world around us and develops the ability to empathize by taking into account the narratives of other people who survived traumatic experiences.

Yet, the strongest voice and the strongest messages are derived from the immediate experience for *Nothing ever becomes real till experienced-* John Keats.

Trauma has many adverse effects which are not all necessarily negative. It helps build resilience which is a crucial element for surviving. It can be defined as the process of using all available resources in order to adapt to and survive stress or trauma. (Lee, 2012)

Resilience is an extremely significant feature of the human psyche as it does not only help survive and surpass one trauma in particular. On the broader level it builds individual's general sense of surviving, something that can be named traumatic intelligence. As a matter of fact it builds person's readiness to deal with future stress. On the other hand, people with higher emotional intelligence respond better to traumatic experience. (Hunt, Evans, 2004)

In some cases an artistic output leads to the occurrence of resilience as means of overcoming trauma. Survivors are those who devise means of fighting the consequences of trauma either by using means of personal narratives, documentary records, cultural rituals and expressions. (Braga, Mello, Fiks, 2012). Nevertheless, not every individual possesses the same amount of ability to develop resilience. Some people are more resilient and thus stronger than others. Something that is traumatic to one person can easily be narrated in an objective way by someone else.

Apart from developing resilience, art therapy proved to be another fruitful method in dealing with trauma. A researcher Juliet King investigated the impact of art therapy on human brain. Studies that have been done involved many participants with different diagnosis and they showed that patients experienced increase of joy within the period of one year of being exposed to art therapy. It proved to show significant improvement in cognition, as

well as in treating patients with dementia and neurological disorders. In an attempt to distinguish artist and non-artist brain significant difference was noticed. A non-artist's brain needs more time to process trauma, also to work harder and to employ higher executive function in judgment and awareness due to lack of non-experience in art creation. (King, 2016)

Debra Kalmanowitz, a researcher who deals with the context of trauma, political violence and social change, locally, internationally and in countries of conflict, has worked with refugees, asylum seekers, survivors of torture and disasters for over 20 years. In an article Inhabited Studio two women who were refugees from different countries took part in an experiment which was focused on the usage of art therapy as a response to political violence and trauma.

The two women in question were both victims of the political violence in Hong Kong. One of them made art in which she described her femininity as well as her terror after the experienced horrors of being raped while she was five months pregnant. This led to loss of her baby and she used art to express her pain and fears of potential loss of fertility. She said that art helped her to express what she could not say in words and also to as she said 'see her thoughts outside of herself', which offered relief. The consequences of violence in this case were personal and were assaults to the very core on one's existence. In such horrible circumstances victims need to start life all over again on the foundations of devastation, loss and destruction. In order to do so, victims need a lot of strength and willingness to live in the first place.

Artistic creation is important and has the effect of healing because it allows the expression of internal thoughts, fears and emotion in a safe way. The act of creation also enables the access to imagination, creativity and ability to symbolise. Art creation helps in a way that it allows distance from the traumatic event by using metaphors or symbols and the ability to present the inner world of thought and emotion. It also allows the possibility to approach it outside of an inner self. This is very important because in some cases alexithymia or the inability to describe one's emotions occurs as well.

In the sense of healing metacognition is very important as it is explained as self- awareness, an ability to be aware of thoughts and emotions that return an individual to a past event of experienced trauma. As a consequence of this mental re-exposure, victims tend to become overwhelmed. By developing sense of self- awareness victims of trauma can become mindful and in control of their emotions and become able to recognize the moment of becoming overwhelmed and act in order to prevent it.

One of the women described her experience after the art therapy saying that it helped her to challenge her belief about herself as a woman beyond repair. (Kalimanowitz, 2016)

Traumatization represents a subsequent reaction to a past event which can be overwhelming and also something that affects the victim's integrity. As such it does not enable the possibility that the victim can always fight it alone. The results can be devastating and can cause posttraumatic syndroms as; ASD, acute stress disorder, PTSD a diagnosis including symptoms such as; intrusions, avoidance, negatively changed cognitions. Art and creation are aimed at improving chances of integration and transformation of traumatic experience by expressing inner unspeakable aspects with the final goal of making sense and meaning in the trauma itself. It can help fight against anxiety, enhance both sense of self and sense of safety while at the same time building strength and resilience. (Gerge, 2017)

Benefits of art therapy are evident even with children as creation enables better relationship between a child and a therapist because of the very ability to express otherwise unspeakable experiences, memories, and emotions. (Doherty, 2007)

An artist is usually observed as an eccentric, different individual who lives on the periphery of the society. It is usually supposed that ingenuity derives from pain or pathology and that creativity is caused by some sort of trauma. On the other hand, creativity is a recovery tool from trauma. Therefore, these terms are inseparable. Creativity has mitigating effects on trauma and inspiration leads to resilience. The main healing purpose of creativity is finding meaning to trauma which subsequently leads to overcoming it. This is necessary for normal functioning of every human being as traumatic symptoms such as nightmares, flashbacks, emotional flooding, general feeling of unsafety and distrust and even psychosis cause dis-function on everyday basis. Additionally, themes in the artwork can help in the process of therapy as they will signify to both patient and therapist on which things to focus while performing therapeutic healing.

This is a wonderful advantage that art gives us, since it does not always give financial gain. The reward is within the very process of creation as well as in the final product. (Phillips, 2012)

References:

Braga, L., Mello, M. Fiks, J. (2012), *Transgenerational transmission of trauma and resilience: a qualitative study with Brazilian offspring of Holocaust survivors BMC Psychiatry* https://doi.org/10.1186/1471-244X-12-134

Doherty, K., Eaton, G. (2007) A review of research and methods used to establish art therapy as an effective treatment method for traumatized, State University of New York College at Cortland, Cortland, NY, United States, Elsevier Inc

Gerge A, (2017), International Journal of Art therapy

Giller, E., (1999), What is psychological trauma? Sidran Institute, Maryland

Hunt, N and Evans, D. (2004), Predicting traumatic stress using emotional intelligence, American Psychological Association

Kalmanowitz, D, (2016) Inhabited Studio: Art therapy and mindfulness, resilience, adversity and refugees

King, J. L. (2016) Art Therapy, Trauma, and Neuroscience: Theoretical and Practical Perspectives, Routledge

Lee, T. (2012), Resilience as a Positive Youth Development Construct: A Conceptual Review, Scientific World Journal

Phillips A. H., (2012) Art and Trauma, Creativity as a Resiliency Factor, MSW, LCSW

Sinclair, S. (2017), Sympathy, empathy, and compassion: A grounded theory study of palliative care patients' understandings, experiences, and preferences, Journal list, SAGE Choice https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5405806/

The Order of Labour with Silver Wreath and the Plaque of the Yugoslav Industrial and Mine Workers Trade Union

by Ivana Mancic

MEDALS AND ORDERS bearing the name of Yugoslavia are numerous and can be found all over the world. This testifies to how much President Tito enjoyed distributing orders and medals, of which some three million were struck during his rule. The production of orders, decorations and medals of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia started during the Second World War and continued throughout the existence of Yugoslavia. The first decorations – the Order of the People's Hero, The Order of the People's Liberation, The Order of the Partisan Star, the Order of the Brotherhood and Unity, the Order for Bravery, and the Medal for Bravery – were all instituted in 1943.

Various national leaders (including dictators), diplomats, artists, soldiers and even one 'god'¹ were decorated with Yugoslav awards. The highest class of order, as awarded to foreign nationals, was the Order of the Yugoslav Great Star, presented to Romanian dictator Nicolae Ceauşescu; Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi; the last Iranian Shah, Reza Pahlavi; Bulgarian President Todor Zhivkov; the fifth leader of the Soviet Union, Leonid Brezhnev; Emperor of Ethiopia Haile Selassie; Emperor of the Central African Republic Jean-Bédel Bokassa; Austrian President Kurt Waldheim; and even to members



The Order of the Yugoslav Great Star (courtesy Gentleman's Military Interest Club)

of the Apollo 11 Mission – Neil Armstrong, Edwin Aldrin and Michael Collins – and others.

These orders, which were mostly designed by Antun Augustinčić and Djordje Andrejević-Kun,² were intended for foreign nationals and were made using expensive materials. Tito himself liked to wear many decorations, highlighting the importance he placed on them. By 1960 the number of decorations had increased dramatically with an additional 35 orders, six medals and one commemorative medal. The five-pointed star, which was an official feature on the Yugoslav flag, together with the sickle were frequent symbols and elements of design of many Yugoslav medals and orders.

On 1 May 1945, the Presidency of the Anti-Fascist Council of the People's Liberation of Yugoslavia established an order for rewarding ordinary citizens of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (FRY), the class of order awarded being determined by the level of importance of their achievements. The award was intended for individuals, organisations of collaborative labour and members of the FRY armed forces who deserved special recognition for their accomplishments in promoting communism and advancing the country by building the economy, promoting peace or well-being. The Order of Labour with Silver Wreath was 33rd in the Yugoslav order of wear, with a total of 182,910 awards made.³

The order had three classes, which in decreasing order of importance were: the Order of Labour with Red Banner, the Order of Labour



The Order of Labour with Silver
Wreath, as awarded to Petar Puskas

with Gold Wreath and the Order of Labour with Silver Wreath. The Order of Labour with Red Banner was made of silver while the other two were produced in a copper and zinc alloy. The Order of Labour with Gold Wreath had a goldplated wreath while the Order of Labour with Silver Wreath had a silver-plated wreath. The designs of the lower two levels of the order were very similar, displaying a male and a female worker holding a flower inside the central relief. Behind them is an open book with the 'goldplated' hammer and sickle. The relief is placed inside a 'gear wheel' on a five-pointed star of 45mm diameter. For those who received these highest orders and medals, they were priceless.

Today it is difficult for young people to comprehend what life was like for their parents and grandparents under the Yugoslav Communist regime, where people would work for free to build a country and its economy. To receive such an award was the highest possible reward and



Petar Puskas, foreground left, receiving the Order of Labour with Silver Wreath at a ceremony for distinguished members of the Communist Party on 31 December 1980

recognition, and even more important it meant that their life had had a purpose and that their existence had made a difference. Therefore, the value of these decorations could not be measured in money. However, to the offspring of these communist workers, some of whom were Second World War heroes, these decorations are worthless and today they represent just pieces of metal that can be bought cheaply on online websites and in flea markets. With the death of brotherhood and equality, the value and importance of these awards also perished. Today they are often valued only according to the price of the materials from which they are made, while their design, even though they were designed and made by acknowledged artists, remains completely irrelevant.4

Trade unions

In June 1950 Tito introduced a law in the People's Assembly that addressed the issues of state ownership and thereby introduced a self-management system. The aim was to democratise the workplace and give workers a direct voice in management decisions⁵, and gradually to transfer the ownership and management of factories, mines and railways from the state into the hands of the labouring classes.⁶

The 1963 constitution pronounced selfmanagement as the constitutional right of all people and trade unions were defined as voluntary organisations. The main activities of trade unions were to develop self-management systems within organisations and to enable intermediate roles and participation of workers in managing decisions throughout the workplace. One of the most important roles of a trade union was enabling the working week to be limited to 42 hours. In the beginning trade unions managed



Certificate of the order awarded, issued by the Presidency of the Anti-Fascist Council of the People's Liberation of Yugoslavia, Office for Medals, Belgrade, 1980



Decorated citizens and their wives posing under the slogan 'And after Tito, Tito'

to do so in only a small number of organisations, but by 1964 they ensured that the restriction on working hours was respected in all companies. Significant changes to the structure of trade unions also occurred, and from the then existing 20 trade unions, six were formed. One of these was the Industrial and Mine Workers Trade Union.⁷

An article in Sremske Novine of 11 October 1978,8 for which my grandfather, Petar Puskas, was interviewed after receiving the Plaque of the Yugoslav Trade Union of Industry and Mine Workers, explains that when he, as a 17-yearold shoemaker, joined the trade union, artillery was still firing on the frontline before 'freedom arrived'. The article further describes how my grandfather's career development was also the development path of the factory in which he worked. In my grandfather's words they would 'work hard, with Sundays left for unpaid voluntary work'. The trade union even initiated a competition for 'the worker of the week' which was judged by the number of extra hours they worked. His efforts as a trade union member were aimed at helping his co-workers. If someone was sick, the union would assist them financially and it would also distribute food and clothing that were too expensive or too hard to find. One of his dearest memories was the New Year they celebrated in the factory, as they went to the celebration straight from the workshop.

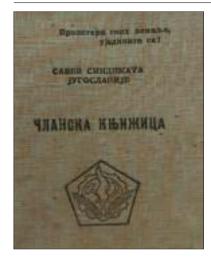
The award was a huge acknowledgement both of his and his factory's work. The article states that he was awarded the plaque for his extraordinary length of service. The fact that his work was recognised gave him great pleasure

and pride as that award was not something one would receive every day.9

This need to praise workers as an important part of the production chain was one of the distinctive features of Communism. Communist self-management ideology actually celebrated workers as producers who used their hands to create products, while all other groups of society lived off their backs. ¹⁰ Yugoslav trade unions, on the other hand, made attempts towards increasing productivity and improving the standard of living of workers, and in addition; workers were allowed to strike; 31 strikes were organised during 1964-65. Nevertheless, by the



The plaque of the Yugoslav Industrial and Mine Workers
Trade Union for special contributions within the trade union





Trade union membership booklet with the communist slogan 'Proletarians of all countries unite'. Inside are the booklet with name and surname: 'Petar Puskas'; profession: 'shoemaker'; year of birth: 'aps3'; date of joining the Union: 'abolo1/1945'; date the first membership fee collection: 'oa/0a/1956'; and the stamp of an authorized official

beginning of the 1980s serious signs of social and economic collapse started to emerge as productivity decreased and the economy began to shrink. There was also a rapid rise of foreign debt as everyone was allowed to take out foreign loans. Prices increased and there was a harsh decline in living standards as salaries could no longer cover the cost of living. In short, the communist dream started to collapse.

Regardless of the fact that orders such as the Order of Labour with Silver Wreath are falling into oblivion today and are financially quite worthless, they are relevant in the sense that they tell a story, because behind every decoration there is a valuable individual story that tells one about respect, effort and history.

Notes

- ¹ Emperor of Ethiopia Haile Selassie, who was venerated as a god by around a million Rastafarians and was the proud bearer of the Order of the Yugoslav Great Star
- Novosti (2011), https://www.novosti.rs/vesti/ naslovna/aktuelno.293.html:325958-Srpski-orden-na-

ruskim-grudima (accessed April 2020)

- ³ Siljegovic,B., Todorovic,V. (1985), *Military*
- Encyclopaedia, Belgrade.
- ⁴ Kokosar (2012), http://kokosar.com/JNA-ordeni.htm Kokosar, 2012, (accessed April 2020)
- 5 Dan Online (2018)
- ⁶ Telegraf (2016), https://www.google.com/ search?q=prodavnica+tuznih+uspomena+i+propalih+ ideala&rlz=1C1CHBF (accessed December 2019)
- ⁷ Robertson J. (2017), *The Life and Death of Yugoslav Socialism*, Jacobin, New York.
- ⁸ Hoxha, E. (1978), *Yugoslav self-administration Capitalist theory and practice*, p 20. Institute of Marxist-Leninst studies of the Central Committee of the Party of Labour of Albania, Tirana
- ⁹ Sindikat (2011), https://web.archive.org/ web/20110808025408/http://www.sindikat.rs/ istorijat.htm, (accessed November 2020)
- ¹⁰ Sremske Novine, Dusan Poznanovic (1978), Pocelo je u crvenom kuticu, Ruma
- ¹¹ Grdesic, M. (2008), Workers and Unions after Yu, Mapping the Paths of the Yugoslav Model: Labour Strength and Weakness in Slovenia, Croatia and Serbia, p 10. European Journal of Industrial Relations
- 12 Sindikat (2011), op cit

Ivana Mancic

Outside of Memories We Belong, Women of Yugoslavia

Bionote: Ivana Mancic is a Ph.D, researcher in Fine Art, School of Art and Design at Nottingham Trent University, U.K., with the focus on art practice aimed at the production of multi-disciplinary artworks, videos and installations the purpose of which is to display the personal narrative to address the issues of war, loss and belonging, related to the specificity of the ex-Yugoslav context in order to contribute to developing of the female voice of artists and pacifists in contemporary art. The personal narrative is presented in the written form through artworks, texts, essays and reflections on war experiences and current world crises through intersections between the present and the past.

Nottingham Trent University ivana.mancic2017@my.ntu.ac.uk

Abstract: This article addresses the issues surrounding the Yugoslav Civil War by offering my personal narrative in relation to loss and disappearance resulting from the exposure to war and sanctions in the nineties and the "Merciful Angel" operation of bombing of Serbia by NATO in 1999. It thus focuses on the female interpretation of people, ways of life, buildings and human artifacts belonging to the historical period of communist Yugoslavia which once were, yet no longer remain. The work with archives, especially the photographs which originate from my personal family possession, brings closer these ghosts of the past times to the present moment. At the same time, photography is a means to investigate the position and treatment of women during and after the period of Yugoslavia, their efforts and struggles for emancipation. The usage of photography as a visual narrative allows an insight into the lives of women during communism through the lens of my closest female family members. The article tackles different issues of concerning women in communist Yugoslavia, and follows certain steps in their history, from the emancipation following the Second World War and participation of women in battle as combatants and nurses, their efforts in rebuilding the country and subsequent

re establishment of patriarchal values which occurred at the start of Yugoslav Civil war and conflicts that marked it. Autoethnography as a research method combined with personal narrative allows a deeper understanding of culture and values of Yugoslav society and their subsequent clash. In addition to this, it celebrates the importance of female voice and activism in the constant battle against patriarchy and women who chose to defy it by acknowledging responsibility and patriarchal nature of war. Photographic practice-based research allows an insight into individual stories which form a deeper understanding of the pre- and post- war Yugoslav society and political circumstances surrounding it.

Keywords: autoethnography, personal narrative, emancipation of women, Yugoslavia, photography, family archive, practice-based research, female voice

Storytelling is an activity which 'reveals meaning without committing the error of defining it¹-Hannah Arendt

Autoethnography as a research method focuses on self, uses memory as a source of research data and as such is a highly personalized account that draws from the experiences of a researcher in order to extend social understanding. Without a personal story, knowledge and theory become disembodied words.² The usage of autoethnography as a research method enables witnessing and testifying on behalf of my personal experience in order to illustrate facets of cultural experience.³

Nevertheless, it is located at the boundaries of disciplinary practices and is therefore frequently questioned as a valuable research method which still needs to fight for its status of a proper research methodology.⁴

Auto ethnography focuses on an understanding of culture and society through the self, the personal experience is primary data while

32

Hannah Arendt, Men in dark times (Massachusetts: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 1970), 94.

² Carolyn S. Ellis and Arthur P. Bochner, "Analyzing Analytic Autoethnography an Autopsy," Journal of Contemporary Ethnography 35. 4. (2006): 429-449.

³ Carolyn Ellis, Tony E. Adams and Arthur P. Bochner, "Autoethnography: An Overview," Forum: Qualitative Social Research 12.1. (2011): Art 10.

Andrew C. Sparkes, "Autoethnography and Narratives of Self: Reflections on Criteria in Action," Sociology of Sport Journal 17.1. (2000): 21-43.

Identities

the individual narrative forms a bigger story of the society. The goal of an auto ethnographer is to achieve a wider cultural understanding on the basis of individual experience, self-reflection, analysis and reflective writing.⁵

Personal narratives are works of history, society and individual and this very intersection of the personal and the societal is a new vantage point that allows for a unique contribution to social science. As such, they deal with both social and individual since the lives lived within the society were shaped by the very values and qualities of the society itself. Systems of language, values, power, culture, symbols, geographies and histories are integral parts of a life within the society. Personal lives were set within the social relationships with family and community, therefore the narrators that recall them and their impetus are elements of the society as well.⁶

In relation to this and using autoethnography as a research method, my personal narrative addresses the issues of loss, memory and belonging that have marked the historical chapter surrounding the Yugoslav Civil War, and, as such, investigates the steps of emancipation of women in Yugoslavia, while photography, as an element of practice based research, serves as a medium to enable witnessing and allows me to testify on behalf of my personal experience in order to illustrate facets of cultural experience.

My testimony derives from the consequences of conflicts and migrations during and after the Yugoslav Civil War and the NATO Bombing of Serbia in 1999. Loss of identity, loss of a sense of belonging, loss of possessions, physical life, and loss of dignity are at times determined by the quality of my memories presented through the written narrative.

One of the pitfalls of autoethnography is that memory is not always linear, and it is at times hard to identify and describe it using a linear narrative even though the language we use to present it, requires linearity. Therefore, alternative means of expression are sometimes needed⁷ and photographic practice-based research can help in this

respect, as it also allows me to test the quality of some of my memories. While explicit memories are based on episodic knowledge and their aim is mainly to inform, they do not affect daily activities and preferences. Unlike them, implicit memories emerge as an emotional response to an association or a cue related to the context in which the traumatic experience occurred, and their retrieval is experienced as a current emotion with properties similar to the initial emotions. Memories such as these can directly influence attention, behaviour and thinking and are immediately aimed at protecting a person and at avoiding danger. Some therapeutic treatments of implicit memories suggest that they can be dealt with by re experiencing them and in that way change the way in which they are interpreted, thus framing them in a flexible narrative by integrating memories of trauma into someone's life story and the totality of a person's identity.

The Yugoslav Civil War, known around the world for its horrors and immense brutality, as well as ethnic cleansing, mass rapes, lost homelands, lost hope and identity—both national and gender, had a great impact on both feminists and women across the world and its effects were of huge transnational importance. With regards to this and as a response to war, certain women, pacifists, and artists from ex-Yugoslav countries, appeared on the public scene using art to criticize the patriarchal nature of the society and war. This emerging female voice represents a unique step of acknowledgment, responsibility and memory.

The "male paradigm" is characterized by "impersonal abstraction." According to traditional academic male-centred forms of scholarship based on male systems of logic and morality, female writing is more personalized but as such, might at times, be silenced and delegitimized. Contrary to masculine energy that "intimidates, constrains, demands, objectifies, and enforces," the energies work-

⁵ Heewon Chang, Autoethnography as Method (London: Routledge, 2008), 49.

⁶ Barbara Laslett, "Personal Narratives as Sociology," *Contemporary Sociology* 28.4. (1999): 392-401, http://www.jstor.org/stable/2655287.

⁷ See: Jenny Edkins, *Trauma and the Memory of Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

^{*}Lawrence J. Sanna and Edward C. Chang, Judgments Over Time: The Interplay of Thoughts, Feelings, and Behaviors (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 285.
*Onno Van der Hart, Paul Brown and Bessel Van der Kolk, "Pierre Janet's Treatment of post-traumatic stress disorder," Journal of Traumatic Stress 2.1. (1989): 195-210, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/j312699643_Pierre_Janet's_Treatment_of_Post-Traumatic_Stress.
*Jelena Batnitic, "Feminiam, Nationalism, and War: The "Yugoslav Case' in Feminist Texts,"
Journal of International Women's Studies 3.1. (2001): 1-23, http://vc.bridgew.edu/jiws/vol3/iss1/1.
**Carole Blair, Julie R. Brown and Leslie A. Baxter, "Disciplining the Feminine," Quarterly Journal of Speech 80.4. (1994): 384-409.

ing through feminine writing can create the potential to allow vulnerability, and new forms of subjectivity to emerge as an element of theoretical work. My feminine voice inside guides the process of writing about events from my past that were buried deep within. By bringing them out into the light of day, their true nature could be witnessed, and they would be permitted to heal.¹²

Jane Rendell, on the *Site Writing* website, in her essay "Conductor: A Tribute to the Angels, *Jane Prophet: 'Conductor',"* quotes Rosi Braidotti and Luce Irigaray, two feminists who explore the relationship between space and subjectivity, and state that these two categories are naturally connected. In their opinion, women were confined by male principles of logic, law and language. As a consequence of this and/or as a result of it, they started questioning the organization of patriarchal time and space. They started rethinking it and accepting "a kind of knowingness or unknowingness that refuses fixity, that allows us to think between, or to think "as if". These female researchers are mediators, who contrary to male approaches "go between and bridge rather that cut through."¹³

Women in Yugoslavia

After the Second World War in Yugoslavia, the main postulates of the new-born political system which insisted on class equality, also assumed the equality between women and men. "Women have rights by law, so they already are equal" 14 The fact that women fought in the front lines, side by side with men, allowed for the basic steps of emancipation. At first, they were mobilized in order to support the Partisan War effort against the Nazis, and an estimated 100,000 women actually participated in battle. 15

According to Pantelic, most of them were deployed as nurses but those that actually participated in combat are the ones who conquered another sphere of the public domain and ensured the future position of women in public life. By leaving the house in order to work, women potentially managed to conquer the sphere of the public domain, as after the war they were engaged in the rehabilitation of Yugoslavia and also had a task to propagate the socialist ideology.¹⁶

After the FRY proclaimed the Five-Year Plan of rebuilding the country from the consequences of the war there was an increased need in the workforce. In these new circumstances, women gained special importance. They participated in voluntary work to help rebuild the country. These voluntary actions organized by the Communist party of Yugoslavia allowed and welcomed women to build roads, railways and perform work in the factories. The need for fast industrial development required women to leave housework and enter the public sphere. This sudden emancipation allowed women to have their work appreciated and respected.¹⁷

The Communist Partisan movement during the war promised equal rights to women, seeing gender equality as an inevitable by-product of the unfolding communist revolution. 18

Dwayne Custer, "Autoethnography as a Transformative Research Method," The Qualitative Report 19.37. (2014): 1-13, https://nsuworks.nova.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi/article-2018&context-tor.

¹³ Jane Rendell, "Conductor: A Tribute to the Angels', Jane Prophet: 'Conductor'," *The Wapping Project* (2000), https://www.janerendell.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2009/03/conductor.pdf.

A Rada Iveković and Slavenka Drakulić, "Yugoslavia: Neofeminism—and its Six Mortal Sins," in Sisterhood is Global: The International Women's Movement Anthology, ed. Robin Morgan (New York: The Feminist Press at the City University of New York, 1996), 734-

²⁵ Batinić, "Feminism, Nationalism, and War."

²⁶ Batinić, "Feminism, Nationalism, and War."

¹⁷ Aida Spahić, Amila Ždralović and Arijana Aganović, Women Documented: Women and Public Life in Bosnia and Herzegovina in the 20th Century (Sarajevo: Sarajevo Open Centre, 2014), 74.

²⁸ Batinić, "Feminism, Nationalism, and War."



Figure 1. Voluntary Action in 1977 Yugoslavia, my mother Mirjana Kvaic (on the left) with a friend, photograph taken from my personal family archive, Ruma, Serbia.



Figure 2. Shoe Factory *Fruska Gora*, Ruma, Yugoslavia, my grandmother Milica Kvaic (on the left) with colleagues working, photograph taken from my personal family archive, Ruma, Serbia.

In reality, what appeared as emancipation during communism actually meant that most women had to spend their lives working in both the public sphere and in their homes. In addition to this, the same opportunities were not offered to men and women equally, both in politics and the self-management system which existed in factories. Women were given roles which required little responsibility and offered them limited prospects of building a career.



Figure 3. Women and Tito, my grandmother, Marija Puskas, second on the right, with colleagues from a shoe factory Fruska Gora, Ruma, photograph from my personal family archive, Ruma, Serbia.

Both of my grandmothers worked their whole life in a shoe factory and after their hard work they had to continue taking care of their children, house chores and agriculture as they produced most of their food. Some factories introduced Workers' cards in which all of the extra work hours would be noted, and every worker was expected to fulfil these. Emancipation offered to women the belief that they were equal to men so that they could work even harder at the price of feeling respected.



Figure 4. The inside of the Female Workers' Card Shoe Factory *Fruska Gora*, Ruma, 1947, Yugoslavia, with the name of my grandmother Mara Rakos, photograph of items from my personal family archive, Ruma, Serbia.



Figure 5. My grandmother Mara Rakos, in 1944, age 16, working in a shoe factory, photograph taken from my personal family archive, Ruma, Serbia.

In Hemon's words: "My experience of Yugoslavia and experience of people in my vicinity was shaped very much by propaganda, but not only propaganda. For my family and many other families, the new socialist system marked the leap from poverty because the progress and optimism which arose after WW2 led to the creation of the middle class and some of these people, our parents, were born in houses with dirt floors." 19

The communist regime allowed citizens to get an education, college degrees, steady jobs, cars, weekend houses, and to take summer holidays on the Adriatic coast. People believed in this communist ideal and lived it. My mother, like many other women, also stood with this belief and she still believes that these subtle ideas of brotherhood and equality are noble in their core.

She believed (and still does) in social justice, generosity, and a fair distribution of wealth. She believed in the system committed to making the country better; Tito and the Party were that system.²⁰



Figure 6. My mother Mirjana Kvaic (on the right) in 1985 Yugoslavia, skiing with friends, photograph taken from my personal family archive, Ruma, Serbia.

98

³⁹ Aleksandar Hemon, "My Mother and the Failed Experiment of Yugoslavia," The New Yorker (June 05, 2019). https://www.newyorker.com/culture/personal-history/my-mother-and-the-failed-experiment-of-yugoslavia

²⁰ Ibid.

After the divorce, my mother eventually managed to acquire one of the free, state apartments, but I remember her struggle through life, being a divorcee in the communist system. These apartments were not always easy to gain, especially for women. The one she lived in did not have a bathroom, and I remember this well, and I remember feeling this sense of unfairness and today I understand why. Through her struggle I realized how obvious these inconsistencies within the communist society were and how the emancipation of women in communism did not run smoothly.

Aside from that, and despite the fast emancipation of women in socialism, the subsequent re-establishment of the old premises of the patriarchal society and the rise of nationalism soon followed, preceding the armed conflicts of the 1990s.²¹

The ways in which women were treated depended on the circumstances and needs of the society and therefore the road to emancipation was not linear, but rather, turbulent. The relatively peaceful period in Balkan history, from the end of WW2 to the armed conflicts in the nineties, was marked by the jump from patriarchal values to the sudden emancipation of women. This ostensible emancipation was followed by a subsequent decadence marked by the reinvention of the patriarchal values for developing nationalist discourse, which preceded the Yugoslav Civil War.²²

The pre-conflict era had seen the re-patriarchalization of Yugoslavian society and an essentialist conceptualization of dominant gender roles. This was the basis for the militarization of society and mobilizing the population for war. ²³

The rejection of communism meant that many values, including that of gender equality were to be discredited. The role and expectations of women changed as the tendency of seeing them as mothers and symbols of the nation occurred, thus emphasizing their biological role as those in charge of the reproduction of the nation.

As a result of the rise of nationalist ideology, the idea of patriotic womanhood was born, and a woman's task was no longer to build socialism through work and defend its values but to regenerate the nation through the role of mother.²⁴

These new gender roles adapted individuals to war roles and for the war system to change fundamentally for the sake of ending wars, profound changes in gender relations are necessary.²⁵

What followed were dark times and rainy days. Sometimes it rains in a different way and it is peaceful and solemn, the rain that purifies. But those days that marked the dusk of Yugoslavia were simply gloomy. That rain had nothing in common with the simple pleasures of childhood, when one rejoiced just by seeing the merry dance of the raindrops on the concrete and the surrounding nature breathing together with the soaking soil. That rain could not wash off the dark days. It did not bring any good, but instead, gloomier and gloomier news from the war zone. Yes. They did really wage wars only an hour away. I did not know about it as I was only eleven, and on the other hand it was there, in the air and we all sensed it. The dark days of our childhoods. The days in which we were to forget that we should be equal. The days in which brotherhood and equality were condemned by men who wanted to play war. The days in which we were so poor and some of them suddenly so rich. Those days were heavy. with lead skies that do not promise anything good. At the edge of my childhood there it was, the foresight of horror. The irony of it all is that it did not really happen to us, we did not get killed but parts of us died. There, at the edge of my childhood were the worried faces of my parents trying to make some sense in madness.

I also remember the bombing. I was nineteen. All the bridges that connected Serbia and the northern province of Vojvodina were already destroyed. There was fire and smoke everywhere. Novi Sad, the capital of Vojvodina, was covered in flames. It felt as if I was turning grey from the inside—as if someone took all of the colours away. As if all the sense disappeared. We, the ordinary people, could not face it. The psychological strain, the burden was too much. When I

²² Spahić et al., Women Documented, 81.

Sonja Licht and Slobodan Drakulić, "When the Word for Peacemaker was a Woman: War and Gender in the Former Yugoslavia," Research on Russia and Easter Europe 2 (1996): 111-139, https://www.scneksetudie edur.s/pen/publishingolnine-materia/women-s-studies-journal/296when-the-word-for-peacemaker-was-a-woman-war-and-gender-in-the-former-yugoslavia.

²³ Maja Korac, "Is there a Right Time for Gender-Just Peace?," *Gender and Education* 28.3 (2016): 431-444-

⁻¹4 Wendy Bracewell, "Women, Motherhood, and Contemporary Serbian Nationalism," Women's Studies International Forum 18.1-2. (1996): 25-33.

²⁵ Charlotte Bunch, "Feminism, Peace, Human Rights and Human Security," *Canadian Woman Studies* 22.2.(2003): 6-11.

look back to those days, they simply have no colour. They feel like someone had stripped them of every meaning.

I remember looking at my country burn through the windowpane. I remember the factories burning in the distance, the effort of so many communist workers disappearing. The dream disappearing. Their hopes and beliefs disappearing in flames. Thick black smoke elevating towards the sky. I was aware that that bomb could hit us at any second. I was aware of all the senselessness of hiding. But human beings are miraculous in their willingness to prevail against all odds and that is how I survived- through the flames, and I became resilient to sorrow and pain, to hunger, to humiliation, to misery. I sometimes think that this is how I travel through life, in smoke, always through smoke. Regardless of realizing the frailty of our own existence, we, the women of Yugoslavia I knew, prevailed, through flames and smoke.

Nevertheless, even today, in the era of the migrant crises, with the migrants stuck in Serbia in their attempts to cross the borders with EU countries, women are remembered again, in frequent narratives about the refugee men who are raping "our women." It is this hypocritical relationship that marked the treatment of women in and after Yugoslavia, by always involving them in political discourses and using them for media purposes. Therefore, women in Yugoslavia and in post-Yugoslav era were betrayed and misused by political systems. From mine and the experience of the women around me, I can conclude that women have been dragged into the political circumstances of their time, most of them forced to simply coexist with war, hunger and crises.

Nevertheless, through the constant clashes and conflicts, some women realized that, as a half of humanity, they do have the right to have their voice heard and to participate in the decision-making, both in peace and war, and therefore should have a say in all of the activities that have an effect on their lives. In that sense, gender balance, as a democratic principle, is essential to the right of women to engage in peace building and it should ensure that women can reject nationalist discourses and projects and choose to act against them. Regardless of this, activists are still seen as traitors and are subjugated to the general contempt and rejection by their own

communities²⁶ and those women who choose to defy patriarchy and thus undermine the existing order, such as Women in Black, Serbia, are deprived of support and appreciation.²⁷ Fighting patriarchy and war as its product is an ongoing process and in this fact lies the importance of female activism and the female voice.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Vjollca Krasniqi et al., Feminism and Nationalism, Yugoslav Feminisms (Belgrade: ProFemina, 2011), 57.

BODY OF PRACTICE

CHASING GHOSTS

IVANA MANCIC

Body of Practice submitted alongside the main thesis as a part of requirements of Nottingham Trent University for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

June 2024

INTRODUCTION:

Body of Practice *Chasing Ghosts* is a combination of personal narrative writing and photographic practice-based research. Both practice and narration in their own way address the issues surrounding the Yugoslav Civil war and the "Merciful Angel" bombing operation of Serbia by NATO in 1999. The female voice in this respect, tells a story about the Yugoslav people, their ways of life and the society which ended with the start of the Yugoslav Civil war. Both photographic practice-based research and the personal narrative offer autoethnographic and ethnographic insight into the pre- and postwar Yugoslav society and the political circumstances surrounding it.

Table of Contents:

Introduction	i
Table of Contents	II
1.1 Loss- The Fairy Tale of Yugoslavia	
1.1.1 Years Before the War/ Burying a Dream: Moments Remembered 1	
1.1.2 Beginning of War: Moments Remembered 2	10
1.1.3 Refugee Crises 29 Years Ago	11
1.1.4 The First Encounter with Nationalism: Moments Remembered 3	24
1.2 The Colour of Memory	30
5.2.1 The Bus and Rail Station: Moments Remembered 4	30
5.2.2 Tito's Pioneers: Moments Remembered	35
1.3 Displacement	38
1.3.1 Displacement as a Memory: Moments Remembered 6	38
1.3.2 Sunny Beach: Moments Remembered 7	45

1.4 My Memory, Trauma and Healing -Shifting Properties of Memory	52
1.4.1 Totality of My Existence: Moments Remembered 8	52
1.5 My World/Story as Seen/Experienced Through – Communism and Religion	66
1.5.1 My Family and Trade Unions	66
1.5.2 The Orders of Yugoslavia in My Experience and Understanding	75
1.5.3 Old Market in Skopje, North Macedonia: Moments Remembered 9	84
1.5.4 My Experience of Women in Communism	90
1.5.5 My Personal Space Within Identity Definition	101
1.5.6 First Day of School, 1986: Moments Remembered 10	101
1.5.7 Where Do I Belong? – On Belonging	113
1.5.8 Denial: Moments Remembered 11	113
1.6 Hunger and Inflation as Paths Towards the Revolution	123
1.6.1 Celebrations: Moments Remembered 12	123
1.6.2 1990: Moments Remembered 13	128

1.7 Death	134
1.7.1 What About the Empty Space? Moments Remembered 14	134
1.7.2 Bombing of Serbia 1999: Moments Remembered 15	140
1.8 Today	153
1.8.1 29th November 2019: Moments Remembered 15	

1.1 LOSS- THE FAIRY TALE OF YUGOSLAVIA

Life during communist Yugoslavia to me seemed peaceful and financially stable for most people. From my perspective, most people around me lived in a bubble: regular pay, holidays, and overall security. There were plenty of work opportunities and workers were respected. The basic premises of communism based on the common belief in equality were respected, and life was based on them. It was an unrepeatable utopia, a utopia in which, in my perspective as a child, most people believed, and in retrospect were urged to believe in. People were prompted to believe that they were all created equal, and life was idyllic, if an individual stuck to the communist belief, supported the communist party and did not ask too many questions. The state of consciousness was one of self-satisfied coexistence of people belonging to different religions. In fact, to be more precise, Yugoslavia was a country in which religion was of secondary importance, while the conviction in the institution of the Communist party prevailed over religious belief. In that atmosphere of trust in equality, all the inhabitants of this utopian country lived together, non- biased and liberated from religion strings. However, that did not mean that cultural differences were not respected. Old traditions were celebrated, and all religious holidays were public holidays, no matter whether it was Orthodox or Catholic Christmas, Easter or Bayram. For us kids, that meant longer holidays and no school. It was a common thing to marry a person of a different religious background, citizens were prompted to do so, and many children were of mixed origin, Muslim, Orthodox and Catholic.

Quoting Hanon (2019): "Yugoslav culture reflected back to its middle class what it practiced every day, in the form of narratives cleansed of conflicts and doubts, infused with latent propaganda, and spiced with a lot of good humour, all of which made Yugoslavia's present look eternal, natural, and indestructible. The Yugoslav culture—which really meant television and popular music—of the sixties and seventies, up to Tito's death, featured people like my parents, regardless of their ethnic background. They would turn on the TV and see themselves, played by household-name actors addressing one another as comrades and cracking the same kind of jokes about women gossiping, men being unable to locate their socks, and their country-bumpkin mothers-in-law coming for a visit, buckets of stinky pickled cabbage in tow".

1.1.1 Years before the War/ Burying a dream: Moments remembered 1

Hanon (2019) further describes the communist Yugoslavia by saying: "My experience of Yugoslavia and experience of people in my vicinity was shaped very much by propaganda, but not only propaganda. For my family and many other families, the new socialist system marked the leap from poverty because the progress and optimism which arose after the WW2 led to the creation of the middle class and some of these people, our parents, were born in houses with dirt floors".



Figure 13: On a Ferryboat, Adriatic Sea, 1986, photograph from my family's personal collection (image quality affected by age)

The communist regime allowed the citizens of Yugoslavia to get an education, college degrees, steady jobs, cars, weekend houses and summer holidays at the Adriatic coast.

I remember travelling by car with my dad every summer, mostly to Croatia and Slovenia. He loved to go camping, although many people went to state-owned resorts. For me, these trips represented precisely what Yugoslavia stood for, vast, open space which allowed for the opportunity to travel and explore while sharing these experiences with people who, same as me, belonged to different nationalities, but at the same time, belonged to one nation and proudly called themselves Yugoslavs.

Never again have I felt such sense of freedom which I shared back then with my father, in those moments of our travels through the Yugoslav Adriatic coast, through our mountains, fields and breath-taking nature, through this vast space which remained there, in the past, while my father was alive, while our ideals were alive and while Yugoslavia, with all it represented for us, existed. Even though the years that followed brought an end to it all, no matter how much I lost, there is still something that remains. How do we separate dreams from reality? By these simple reminders of what once was, by these threads, chipped elements of our memories. For me, now when Yugoslavia is long gone, together with my father and our travels, memories still persist, as a part of the microcosmos of my soul, and these tiny threads will always remain a constituent part of me.

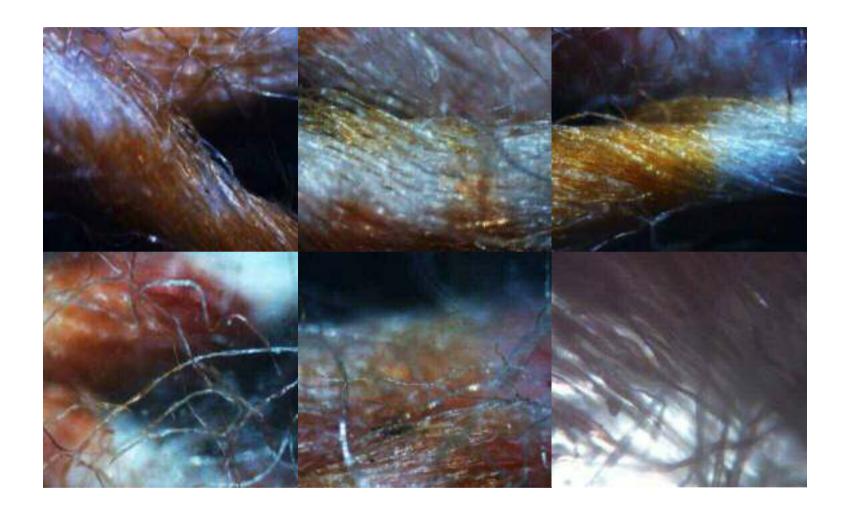


Figure 14: *Thread from a camp bed*, microscope photographs, magnification X1000, samples taken from the camp bed used for camping in Ankaran, Slovenia, 2020, Ruma, Serbia



It was also possible to get state loans, and these were given with lowinterest, which allowed my grandfather and father to build one more house on our piece of land for my parents and I to live in. After their failed marriage, that house stood as an omen of the subsequent dissolution of Yugoslavia and its values, which eventually and unexpectedly hit our lives. Devoid of meaning, it stood there, that "new house", as my grandparents called it, never quite finished, never quite as it was supposed to be, with my father refusing to live in it. Therefore, my grandparents moved there, and dad and I stayed in their old house. Today I see that house as another souvenir of the communist experiment that had gone bad. To me it does not signify a bad omen in the material sense, because the material building means nothing. The events connected to it, the events that coincide historically to Yugoslavia during those young years of my life, simply merged into the same whole. That house was an attempt by my grandfather and my father to meet the expectations set for the middle class. Simply put, their ideology was aimed at gaining and building. To this day, I am not sure whether that came from the communist belief only, or also from the fact that my granddad was a World War II orphan, who lost his father in battle. In any case, the house that they built using the state loan, stood there as a shameful memory of an attempt to be "normal" while the word itself echoed with societal expectations because that house and our lives in it were all, but normal.

For me, this site situatedness is crucial, as it defines my narrative and therefore sets it in the context in which I grew up. Living to see my family house as an omen of the subsequent decay, to me correlated with the dissolution of Yugoslavia. This very act of building that second, two story house and the subsequent loss of its expected function which preceded the actual dissolution by a mere couple of years, and then our lives after the dissolution, again in that same place, that house, our lives in sanctions, inflation, quarrels, and violence.

Figure 15: My Family House, autoethnographic photograph, 2019, Ruma, Serbia



Figure 16: My Family House, autoethnographic photograph, 2019, Ruma, Serbia (image quality affected to achieve a ghostlike atmosphere)

Finally, the chapter of my life in my family home closed with the last member of my family who inhabited that place, my father, dying. As the last survivor of their legacy, that house remained, and my first impulse was to throw everything away. I remember packing the material things. our possessions in black bags, alone. There was no one else, just empty walls. Only I remained. My Catholic cousins moved to Croatia during the years of war. I remember those black rubbish bags. I remember packing the remains of our lives during Yugoslavia in them. I remember burying our material trinkets after burying my family members. I remember black bags, packed with my childhood memories. I remember packing them together with the ghosts of my deceased family members, in this place where they once lived, with the ghosts of my cousins who lived next door before the war. I remember being alone, yet not guite alone. They were there with me, in my mind, the ghosts of my childhood. Those ghosts lurking in every corner. The ghosts of past times. The ghosts of Yugoslavia. The promise of normal life, which remained simply as such, as just a promise, packed safely in rubbish bags.

For me, my family house represented failure. In retrospect, I am not sure whether it is the result of the dissolution of my homeland or the personal tragedy of my family, that left me with these feelings towards my family home. Even today, I cannot define whether I saw it as failure because of the horrible events surrounding it, or most likely because of the combination of these factors, yet for me, it never really felt right. It never felt as it was promised to be, same as Yugoslavia. For me, the days that followed the dissolution and my life in my family house after it, attained the colour of darkness, identical to the colour of those black bags and reality merged into this bleakness and amalgamated with it.



Figure 17: Remains of a Life, autoethnographic photograph, 2019, Ruma, Serbia

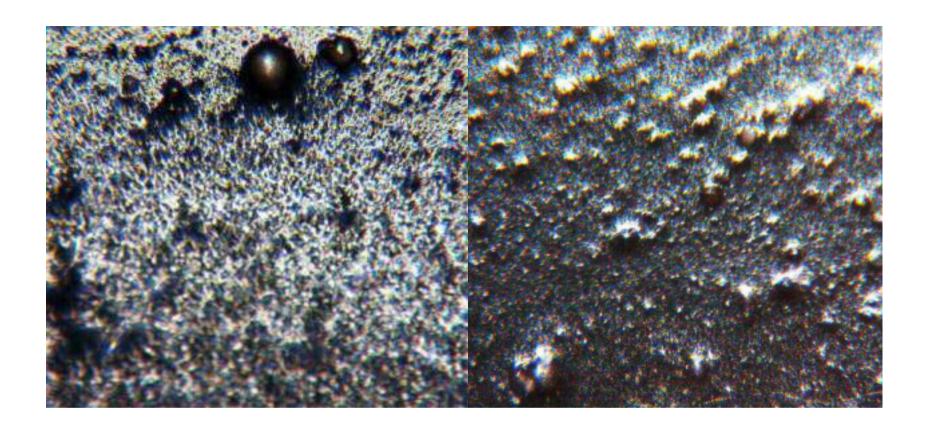


Figure 18: Black bag, microscope photographs, magnification X1000, 2021, Ruma, Serbia

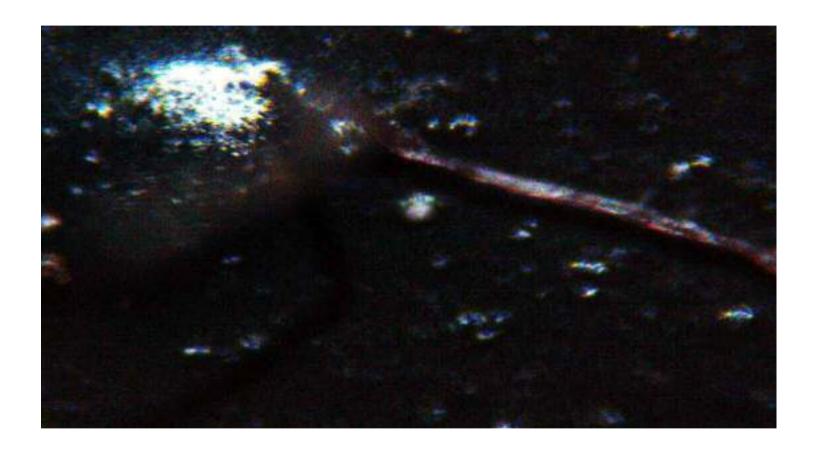


Figure 19: Black bag, microscope photograph, magnification X1000, 2021, Ruma, Serbia



Figure 20: Black bag, microscope photograph, magnification X1000, 2021, Ruma, Serbia

1.1.2 Beginning of War: Moments Remembered 2

For my family the nineties were the era of shock and disbelief. Tucked in by the promises of the communist decades, they were not ready for the upcoming storm.

We lived a dream that found its representation in reality and outgrew it. The description of the atmosphere of my experience of Yugoslavia before the conflict, leads to the question of how the future blood shed was possible. To me today, knowing the outcomes, it almost feels like it could have been expected. I cannot say whether this feeling is simply the consequence of the struggles and events I went through subsequently, but I remember that back then, the shock left me, my family, and our whole community unprepared. We were unequipped to cope with the upcoming events. It created for many of us lifelong traumas. Suddenly, it felt as if we were expected to pick a side. In my opinion, however, this expectation was in the air: somehow implied. How do you pick a side when there were no sides, when many of us originated from mixed marriages?

According to theories by Marx, and modern proponents of these theories such as Bertsch, (see Botev 1994, p.477) in regard to Yugoslav case, the modern industrial society would eventually lead to the disappearance of ethnic conflicts. The Yugoslav case challenged this conventional wisdom and proved that regardless of modernization and industrialization, ethnic divisions in Yugoslavia remained strong enough to lead to war. In the Yugoslav case intermarriage was a signifier of the levels of integration of a society and taking this into consideration, Yugoslavia was never fully integrated. For me and other children I knew who were born in mixed marriages in Vojvodina, in the northern province of today's Serbia, which had the highest percentage of intermarriages (27.6% out of the overall 13% in Yugoslavia between 1980-1982), the Yugoslav Civil war meant being betrayed by the very communist experiment which made us (Botev 1994, p.477).

As I am half Serbian and half Croatian, I consider myself a true example of this Yugoslav communist experiment. Even today, in light of the post-war territorial and political divisions this difference is obvious. Officially, I am Croatian and today this comes with advantages as it determines my belonging, in terms of politics which decided that Serbia cannot join the European Union or in other words in terms of politicians who decide on our destiny. In the same sense, my daughter, also comes from a mixed marriage, but her father is Serbian, so that marked her destiny, at least in terms of rights of movement and she was not allowed to follow me to England without a visa. During my three month's struggles to meet the visa requirements that would enable my child to join me, I felt detached from my own self.

These are not isolated cases as after the dissolution of Yugoslavia many people who descend from mixed marriages faced the consequences of this failed Yugoslav attempt to prove us equal, however, after the war, we were all but equal.

As a ten-year-old child I spent days playing games with the children from my street, collecting stamps, stickers, watching videos and drawing. I had my dreams and my interests. All my cousins who were Croatian lived next door. All my friends who were Serbian also lived next door. The pre-war decade of my childhood was idyllic. I was born to a family of a Croatian father and Serbian mother. Back then that was nothing unusual and I was just another child from a mixed marriage.

According to Baric (2020): "Yugoslavia as we knew it had disintegrated, and my family and I were applying for asylum in the United States. We needed to prove to the UN Refugee Agency that our situation was desperate enough to be taken in. When my dad asked about his "mixed

marriage" to my mom — the reason we had to flee for our lives — my dad responded with a faux-insulted air, as if he didn't understand the concept. "What do you mean I have a 'mixed marriage'? There is no cheating. I don't have a girlfriend." He had a point though. My parents' marriage was labelled "mixed" because they came from two different Christian denominations. His joke was a refusal to acknowledge that the small differences between being a Croat and a Serb could warrant either a special label, or expulsion. And yet, because hardline politicians were lusting after power, so our "mixed" family was villainised and purged, spread across two hemispheres, three languages, and countless communities and identities. When the former Yugoslavia dissolved, so did my family's sense of belonging."

The build-up to the war started unexpectedly and we saw how Slovenia was the first country to leave Yugoslavia. The break-up started peacefully. However, that was a shocking news to us, for we were experiencing the break-up not only of our country but of the whole system of our belief. Our dream of communism came to an end and once the horror of war knocked on people's doors the only thing that mattered was nationality. That was a sensitive point because many people like my family came from mixed marriages and subsequently brothers fought their own brothers on the opposite sides. The news started reporting how neighbors in nearby Croatia started killing each other. There were rumours about war atrocities, and they were spoken as though through some non-transparent fog. Horrors of war, killings and rape, in my case were more implied and always potential rather than real. We never knew when we might be next as the war was an hour away from my home. The hatred took over and madness started to rule in our lives. In my experience the utopian ex-Yugoslavian experiment finally proved that evil always finds its path and its representation in reality, as suddenly, overnight our whole world changed. In Botev's words (1994, p.477) "There is no mystery in country's disintegration, although the violence accompanying the disintegration remains profoundly disturbing ".

1.1.3 Refugee Crises 29 years ago

We observed how news of war in Croatia spread like the plague. After the Croatian battle for independence in the war operation called "Oluja" or "The storm" many Serbians were forced to leave Croatia. I became very aware of the moment when the refugee crises began. In the summer of 1991, the long line of refugees- Serbian civilians from Croatia were making their way to Serbia with the very few possessions they could take with them on their cars and tractors. Children and old people, some of whom spent their whole lives in their homes in Croatia, only to be forced to leave at their old age and die somewhere unfamiliar. I remember those people, sleeping outside, in their tractors or in their cars, if they were lucky enough to bring them along. Others slept in the open air, with days ahead of them before they were sent to one of the refugee centres. I remember the cold, haze, fog and insecurity. It was almost palpable. The people who had no place to go and no possessions. We could have easily been those people, my grandparents, my dad, and me. The insecurity that crawled under one's skin, could be felt in one's bones.

Those who survived came with the little of their belongings they could take. The area where I grew up in, the northern part of Serbia, Vojvodina, became flooded with refugees as it is situated closest to the Croatian border. It became very clear to us how this war was such a horrible thing. It did not spare anyone.



Figure 21: Border, 1991, photograph taken from the archive collection of The County Museum in Ruma, Serbia (image quality affected by age)



Figure 22: Border, 1991, photograph taken from the archive collection of The County Museum in Ruma, Serbia (image quality affected by age)

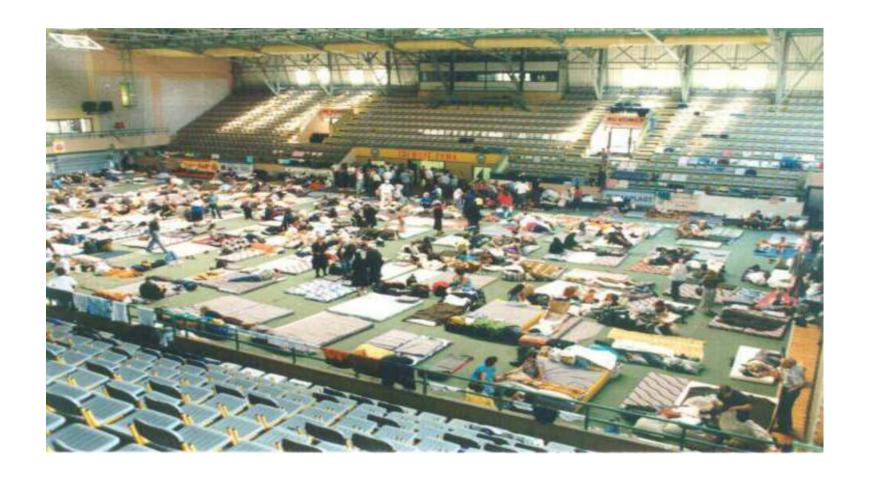


Figure 23: Sports Hall, 1991, photograph taken from the archive collection of The County Museum in Ruma, Serbia (image quality affected by age)



Figure 24: Refugees from Croatia in Ruma, 1991, photograph taken from the archive collection of The County Museum in Ruma, Serbia, Serbia (image quality affected by age)

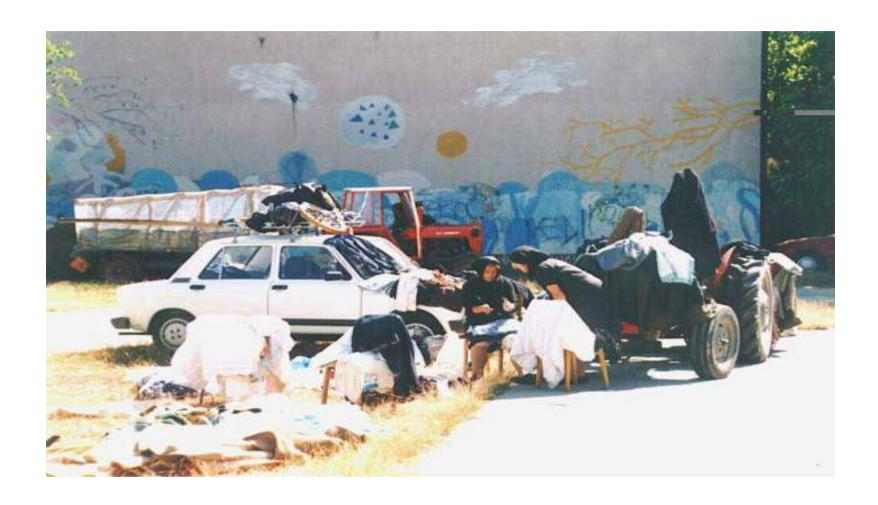


Figure 25: Refugees from Croatia in Ruma, 1991, photograph taken from the archive collection of The County Museum in Ruma, Serbia, Serbia (image quality affected by age)



Figure 26: Exile and Old Age, 1991, photograph taken from the archive collection of The County Museum in Ruma, Serbia, Serbia (image quality affected by age)



Figure 27: Exile and Old Age, 1991, photograph taken from the archive collection of The County Museum in Ruma, Serbia, Serbia (image quality affected by age)

I was brought up mainly by my grandmother and she could have easily been any of the women in the photos, and all that I see looking at them are their harsh old hands accustomed to hard work, hands that took care of families, children, grandchildren, hands that built that same Yugoslav dream, their scarves, aprons, and all that they represent to me. These symbols of home are stripped of every meaning in war.



Figure 28: *Old Age*,1991, photograph taken from the archive collection of The County Museum in Ruma, Serbia, Serbia (image quality affected by age)

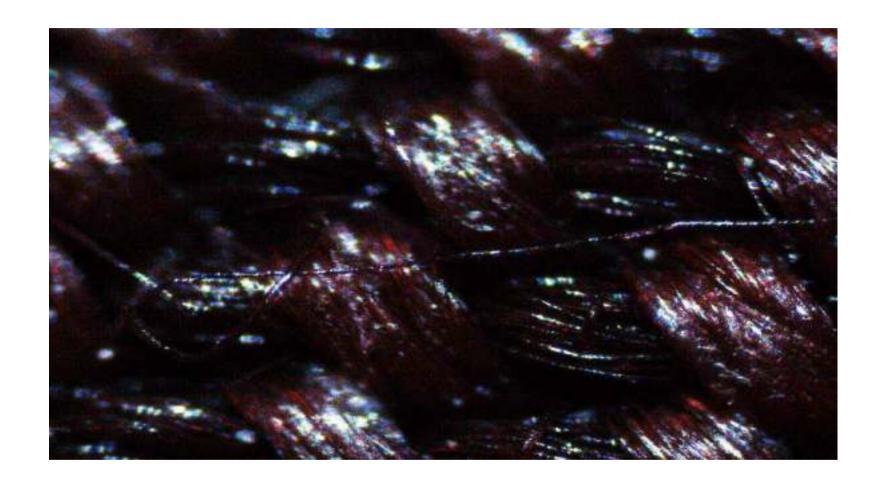


Figure 29: Thread from my grandma's apron, microscope photograph, magnification X1000, 2021, Ruma, Serbia



Figure 30: Thread from my grandma's apron, microscope photographs, magnification X1000, 2021, Ruma, Serbia



Refugee crises from a different perspective

Autoethnography allows presenting different perspectives of events, as is the case regarding my narrative. It also allows different versions of events that are equivalent to the different experiences of the war I experienced, the accounts of which subsequently differ. For example, for the Serbian population, the war operation "Storm" is called "Pogrom" and seen as one, and the day is commemorated as a day of grief in Serbia. However, Croatians celebrate it as liberation day, and the Civil war in Croatia is called "Domovinski "(Domovina means homeland). Examples of this were documented during my travels to Serbia and Croatia in August 2019.

Only 3 days after my trip to Serbia, I had the opportunity to visit the memorial place/site with tanks that glorify "Liberation war" and are a part of the permanent exhibition dedicated to the Croatian defenders of Daruvar, a town in Croatia.

Figure 31: Downtown Novi Sad, Storm, a crime that still lasts, autoethnographic photograph, street exhibition, photographers Martin Candir, image up, Ranko Cukovic, image down, 2019 Novi Sad, Serbia



Figure 32: Square of Daruvar's Defenders, autoethnographic photograph, 2019, Daruvar, Croatia

1.1.4 The First Encounter with Nationalism: Moments remembered 3

Since the age of 3, my father was my legal guardian. I only got to spend weekends with my mother, but I do not really remember missing her. I only recall listening to the echo of high heels in the street outside, full of anticipation and hope that those heels were hers.

On one of these weekends with my mother, precisely a Sunday morning, we received a phone call from my dad. He told me not to come home, as no one knew what would happen. The houses of Croatians in my town were attacked with hand grenades, in an attempt to take over their possessions. Refugees were entering their homes similarly to how they lost their homes in Croatia.

An atmosphere of madness prevailed, and the air was full of fear and lunacy. When people are left with nothing, they would not refrain from taking someone else's possessions. That is the ultimate battle for survival. Not every person will dwell on the basic human values such as dignity or compassion. War tests them and war is the time for revenge, retaliation, and violence.

The whole day passed in tense suspense. The evening allowed the Serbian special forces to intervene. It was as if they were sent as a miracle, and Croatian families could not tell who their guardian was nor who was their enemy. It was a total state of confusion. The Serbian special police forces entered the Croatian houses to defend them. They wanted to ensure the safety of Croatians as many of them opened their doors under threat.

For me it was safe to go home, for the time being.

My next memory was hearing a doorbell a couple of nights later, while having a bath. It was late in the evening, and I was ten years old. I remember how it was dark and I quickly ran out of bath terrified. I was frightened for our safety, and I thought that there might be no time to get dressed and that I would have to run in my bathrobe. I grabbed the little savings I had, equivalent to the amount of 10 euro, the money my family collectively gifted me for my birthday. That is the amount I could save as a child in the period of crises, and it was hidden in the back of a red apple soft toy.

I was ready for the run. All my instincts were awakened and my whole body and mind alert. It felt as if we should run or die. My dad told me that the enemy would not ring the bell. They would use force.

The "enemy", I could not define it at that time. What did the word enemy mean when we were raised in the spirit of brotherhood and equality? If the enemies were suddenly Serbians, then why were some of them protecting us? How did the people that I had known my whole life, my neighbours become our enemies overnight? We did them no harm.

It was a false alarm, but all I could think of was my mother and when and if I would ever see her again.

The sense of danger was always present. It was in the air. Foggy, miserable, and overall sad days only brought more uncertainty.

I have memories of an ordinary day at school, no different from the others. I was 10. While we were sitting in the classroom, some men came in. They asked us about our nationality. There were three Croatians in the class, but that did not matter, until then. We were all taught to observe each other as equal. We were all treated as such. We were all always Yugoslavs, until that day. To my disbelief, all the children instantly proclaimed that they were Serbian. Only three of us declared that we were Yugoslavs. Even at the age of 10 I realized how exposed and vulnerable we were. What a weak shield it was to use the belonging to Yugoslavian identity in the face of evil. It was unbelievable that we were only kids, but my school friends suddenly knew that they were Serbian and the three of us were the "other". Until these events, I did not know that nationalism exists. It was disgraceful, these

men. What were they made of and to what levels of hatred were they brainwashed? What was wrong with the national identity we had up to that day? I continued to go to school with my friends, but never again did I feel the same. To strip children of their sense of safety and to expose their nationality in such an awful manner. To make us feel minor and different. To make us proclaim it in public and to make us fear to say who we truly are. From this perspective, in my personal life that day marked the death of Yugoslavia and its values.

These events made me realise that it is very easy to forget all those subtle elements that make us humans, such us compassion. There is no compassion in the battle for survival. I witnessed how in those times of crises, humans revealed the beast inside and for me, this fact became tangible. I also witnessed how in war circumstances all the worst traits that were well hidden, in the days of peace, such as dissatisfaction, jealousy, greed, all these pettiest human traits came to the surface revealing human weaknesses. More than that, I remember that while learning about nationalism firsthand, I could observe how it was associated with some new national identity, different to the one we were taught to accept in Yugoslavia. I could observe how some of my neighbours who joined the new nationalistic party, famous at the time, became proud of belonging to that newborn identity. I remember being afraid, as I could not belong to it. I often reflect on events during those times and to me it feels as if back then the lives of some people got a new purpose, as coinciding with nationalism, allowed them to feel the power of being above the "other". Suddenly that power enabled them to decide on the destinies of the "other". At the peak of these evil times, we began to understand, that knowing the right people determined whether you get to keep your head. I later learnt that one of the reasons we got to keep our home was the fact that my mum was Serbian and being a teacher, she knew the right people.

I also realized our most affected value was integrity. As previous Yugoslav countries wanted their independence, from day to day the Serbian media bombarded us with with speeches about integrity and territorial sovereignty. The combination of those two words, integrity and sovereignty was inserted in our ears on a daily basis. It formed a feeling of combined and stubborn repetition for the tortured and troubled dwellers of their once beloved homeland.

Nevertheless, I began to understand there is an integrity above the territorial lines. This integrity once lost brings a large-scale disruption and devastation on a personal level. It is the individual integrity and the individual sense of self- belonging that are affected the most.

I understood how once the integral parts of a human being are affected, dissolved, and dismembered, the task of completing the puzzle of one's soul becomes impossible. It takes ages to put the pieces together. Like with a broken piece of china. Even if it gets glued together, marks and scars remain.

On the 24th of May 2020 I had an opportunity to engage in dialogues, discuss the questions on the theme of Non place and have my artworks exhibited as a part of Non place collective during the *Fringe Arts Bath* 2020 festival, available at:

https://www.fringeartsbath.co.uk/nonplace?fbclid=lwAR3uUao4HriTWjq_yMd_kR1d4KkpmuWNHztKN0j2p_c5z-bkOITXxhv8fjw

During the festival, I also organised a webinar 'Chasing Ghosts' covering my practice and research about identity through exposure to the complexity of war and loss; displacement; the fragile category of belonging and the quest for identity as someone who originates from a country that no longer exist – Yugoslavia, available at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Plcs_5fsgVM.

This was my first opportunity to test how my spoken word works together with my art practice and to start searching for the most optimal way to present the personal narrative and for that reason it is very important event.

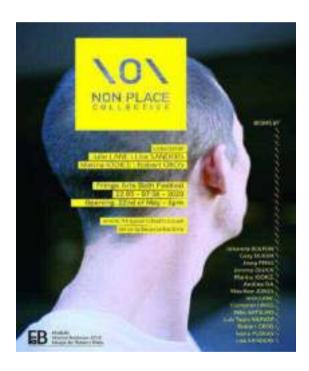


Figure 33: Non-Place Collective, Fringe Arts Bath 2020 festival, Available at: https://www.fringeartsbath.co.uk/nonplace?fbclid=lwAR3uUao4HriTWjg yMd kR1d4KkpmuWNHztKN0j2p c5z-bkOITXxhv8fjw

Chasing Ghosts

The impact of the female voice as confemporary art and conflict representations. Puckes presents a narrative to her experience of a search of identity, through exposure to the complexity of war and loss.

Non place as a theme is relatable to the idea of displacement and to the research into the fragile category of belonging and the quest for identity as someone who originates from the social context of Yugoslavia, a country that no longer exists.

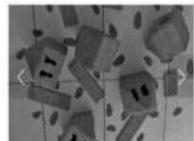
IVANA PUSKAS

LIVE: MAY 24TH 6PM



IVANA PUSKAS

LIVE: MAY 24TH 6PM



IVANA PUSKAS

LIVE: MAY 24TH





Being a part of Non place collective allowed me to further could use my voice together with artwork while presented my art practice at *Fringe Arts Bath*, UK, *This Is not a Shop*, again in the period 11/08/2021 -27/08/2021.

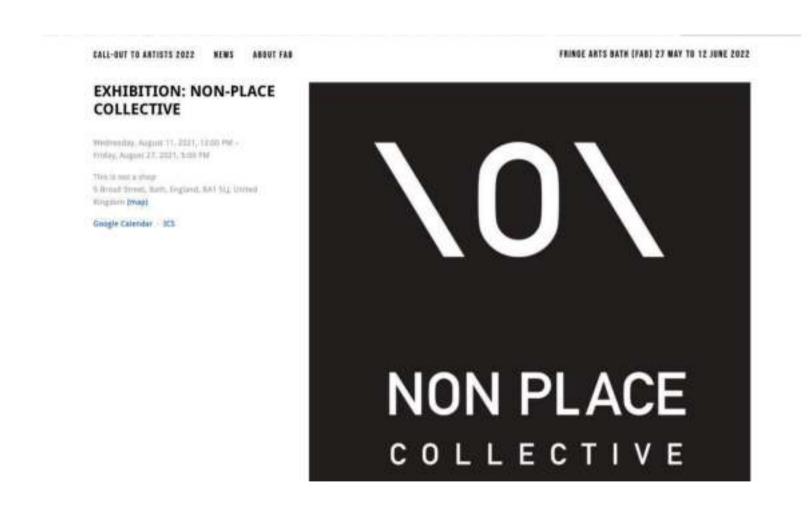


Figure 35: Non-Place Collective, Fringe Arts Bath 2021 festival, This is not a Shop, Available at: https://www.fringeartsbath.co.uk/events/this-is-not-a-shop-non-place-collective

Worth of mention in this respect, is also my participation in the *Lost Festivals*, Festival de Arte Fuerteventura and Lanzarote, Canary Islands, in July 2020. The focus was on the themes of lost language, lost pieces, lost and found, lost children, loss of nature - habitats, wildlife, loss of life - war, terrorism, dangerous immigration routes, normal human existence, lost voices and as a part of the festival I organised a spoken word event *Yugoslavia*, *Memory*. This was a valuable opportunity to use examples of art and autoethnography together to articulate my loss related to Yugoslavia.

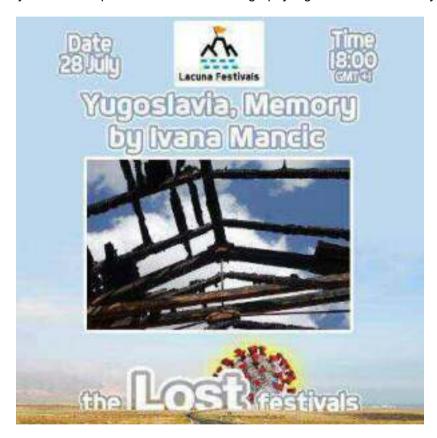


Figure 36: The Lost Festivals, 2020, Available at: https://www.lacunafestivals.com/events.php?fbclid=lwAR30yjmyf9GnymcDQG1DTFwbWuaj0vdGYfAZUY7Ez3PmNVnGTn2WEEVomjY

1.2: THE COLOUR OF MEMORY

"What is the colour of memory? What is the colour of bittersweet? If matter has a weight, does emotion? If space has a colour, does time? What is the colour of longing, longing for the lightness of spring?" (Rendell 2001).

1.2.1: The bus and rail station: Moments Remembered 4



Figure 37: *The Restricted Past*, autoethnographic photograph, abandoned bus station, 2019, Ruma, Serbia

This place, where the bus and rail station in Ruma, Serbia, once stood next to one another, changed its forms during the years and so did the varying purposes of my voyages undertaken from here. As a child I would rejoice simply by the very fact that I was traveling with my dad and the sense of adventure would mix with the pure happiness of childhood.

Today when only memory remains of my dad and the days of peace, tranquillity, and easy joy of living are left behind, in some better past times, I can still recall seeing people laugh, eat and drink in a bus station restaurant. I recall this feeling of anticipation of adventure and the relaxed atmosphere of pure joy of living. Yugoslavia was quite huge, and the railway connected all the capital cities within it, and these were further connected to other European capitals. Young people of Yugoslavia would travel before, as other young Europeans travel today. I see them sometimes on my trips to Croatia- reckless and carefree. They do not care about the borders like we had to, locked within the limited area of our own country, deprived of our youth, joy, and overwhelmed by survival issues.

My later travels from this spot got a much gloomier twist. At the age of eleven, my father took me on a trip again, and this journey I will never forget. The train's route to Croatia led past the war-demolished houses. A mere look at them would chill anyone's bones and even though I was young, I got an instantaneous understanding of how lucky I was. Our house was just an hour away from the warzone and this pure distance determined our destiny. This simple stretch of miles decided on whether I would be killed, mutilated, raped, whether I would see my dad slaughtered or perhaps end up as a refugee, praising God for keeping me alive.



Figure 38: *The Restricted Past*, autoethnographic photograph, abandoned bus station, 2019, Ruma, Serbia

Today I know that what I saw then and there, made me grow up. At the age of eleven, I realised how mortal and disposable we are. The notion of frailty became so evident and that marked me forever. I dealt with this deep understanding of mortality, and it scared me and made me resilient at the same time.

Today the bus station is a sad reminder of the glory of the past times. Sold out, forgotten, and abandoned. Nowadays, it is a place which people avoid. It is a symbol of our downfall and a symbol of disgrace, shame and guilt. It is a symbol of all the other places which once belonged to the Yugoslavian government and are now left to collapse so that greedy politicians and petty thieves, who got a hold of power, can take advantage of them for their own financial gain. Petty, small, disrespectful days mark the post- Yugoslav era. The days that followed were ruled by maniacal plunderage and misuse of power -to sell out, destroy, abandon, acquire, gain.

If we wanted to explain to someone today what Yugoslavia was, we would realise that is hard to retell something that magical, as there needs to exist a different language to talk about the country that was rented out, suffocated, and sold by its worst pioneers (Cvijetic 2017).

On the bus schedule board, the remains of letters are still present to this day, in the form of ironic reference to the previous Yugoslav capitals, which are now separate entities and capitals of new-formed countries, distant to each other. That was an unexpected turn of events, which resulted in the fact that residents of these capitals became foreigners although they once lived as brothers and sisters in the same country. The letters on the board form the words "Ljubljana, Zagreb" to remain as souvenirs amongst the derelict walls.

To past generations, these barren walls and ceilings that are now revealing the parts of once expensive glass wool insulation, had a different meaning. They were elements of the whole system of life that belonged to Yugoslavia. That whole life system disappeared with its generation, with Yugoslav values, with my family members.



Figure 39: Glass wool, microscope photographs, magnification X1000, samples taken from abandoned bus station (middle photograph), 2021, Ruma, Serbia



Figure 40: Glass wool, microscope photograph, magnification X1000, samples taken from abandoned bus station, 2021, Ruma, Serbia



Figure 41: Stafeta (Baton) Day of Youth, 1964, Ruma, photograph taken from the archive collection of The County Museum in Ruma, Serbia (image quality affected by age)

1.2.2: Tito's Pioneers: Moments Remembered 5

After making an oath to Tito, the Yugoslav president, all the Yugoslav schoolchildren, age 7 to 14 would become Tito's pioneers, the future members of the communist party. The purpose of pioneer rituals, symbols, celebrations, and events was to create the notion of a "Yugoslav child", an active future member of a socialist society (Batinic, Radeka and Susnjara, 2016). Most children were transferred to the sphere of the Pioneer organisation, which implied omnipresence of ideology in all areas of life. One of the most important events which included pioneers, was the manifestation of the Pioneer Relay celebrated every 25th May. This was the most massive event organised by the Union of Pioneers. It was dedicated to Tito's birthday and represented a unique greeting to Tito. The first Pioneer Relay of Youth organised in 1953, was soon to become tradition, aiming to stimulate affection for comrade Tito, according to Paravina (see Batinic, Radeka and Susnjara 2016). Each Pioneer squadron had their own baton, and it was transferred from place to place, from town to town in Yugoslavia, during May. The main baton would be delivered to Tito in Belgrade. Quoting Paravina (see Batinic, Radeka and Susnjara 2016): "the purpose of Tito's communication with the Pioneers was the creation of the personality cult." According to Paravina (see Batinic, Radeka and Susnjara 2016) he would then "tell the Pioneers to study and work hard, to respect the achievements of the Peoples' Liberation War, to support brotherhood and unity among the nationalities and minorities of Yugoslavia, and to continue developing socialism".

Today, the only place in my hometown, Ruma, Serbia, that still retains a memory of this long- lost tradition which used to mark Tito's birthday, is the town graveyard memorial site which commemorates the people who lost their lives in the World War II, fighting for the freedom of Yugoslavia, alongside those who lost their lives in the Yugoslav Civil war after its dissolution in the nineties. Between their names still proudly stands the monument to the Baton, although now chipped, forgotten and to me seemingly deprived of meaning.

Figure 42: *Memorial Place*, autoethnographic photograph, 2021, graveyard, Ruma, Serbia



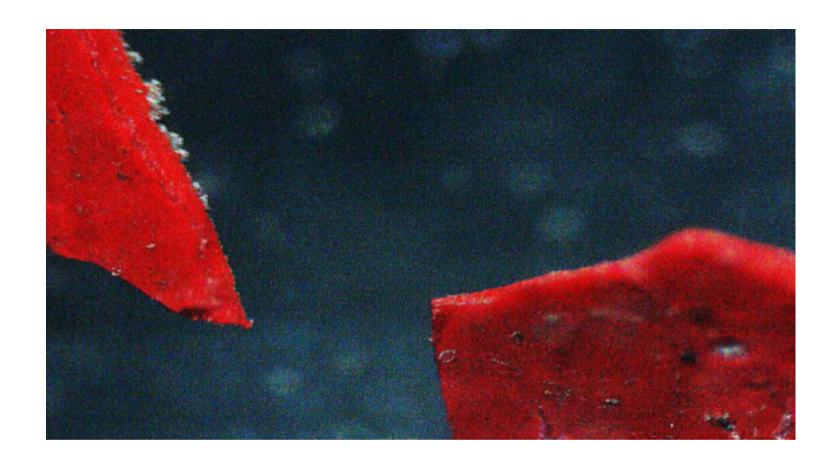


Figure 43: Chipped paint from a baton, microscope photograph, magnification X1000, 2021, graveyard, Ruma, Serbia

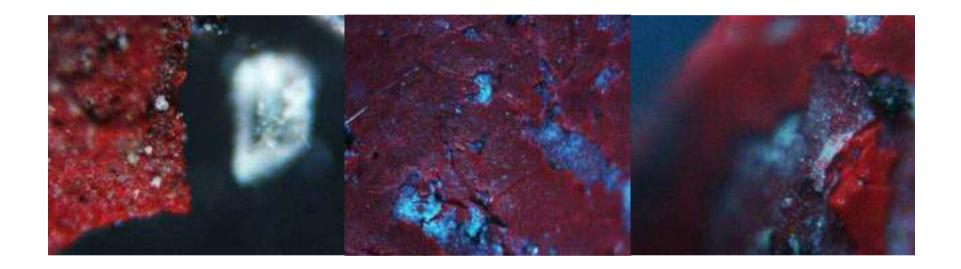


Figure 44: Chipped paint from a baton, microscope photographs, magnification X1000, 2021, graveyard, Ruma, Serbia

1.3: DISPLACEMENT

1.3.1 Displacement as a Memory: Moments Remembered 6

It is 2019, more than 25 years since my cousins left Serbia. It took these 25 years for me to learn, on one of my field trips to Croatia, why they really left. They narrated to me that one of the refugees, a Serbian woman from Croatia entered their house in my hometown Ruma, Serbia, and pointed a gun at my youngest cousin who was two months old and in a cradle at the time. Her mum lost her milk as a consequence of stress and could not breastfeed anymore. After the incident, Serbian refugees from Croatia moved into their home. It must have been dreadful to spend every single day in this artificially forged community with someone who threatened to kill their baby.

How is the world different today after these 25 years and during the Migrant crises?

The Balkan area, always the burning centre, always interesting, always current. So many displaced, so many refugees in this area where hopes live, burn, where hopes die, where hopes are resurrected. Driving towards Croatian border, we encounter many migrants. They are standing by the side of the road, covered with blankets. A man with glasses and a blanket covering his head is walking up and down and he attracts my attention. He is smoking. His face reveals all the confusion and despair. I know this feeling, I felt it before when looking at the face of a homeless person in the street in the UK. I am overwhelmed with helplessness. His face with glasses stays engraved in my mind. I say to my husband, "You know, some of these people are very educated. Should I stop and talk to them?" He answers that it might be dangerous. The desperation might make them take my watch or some other possession. And we drive on. How petty we are, and I am ashamed of worrying about such small material things. I try to comfort myself that I have a teenage daughter in the car and that I might risk her well-being if I stop. Further on, we encounter the Serbian refugee centre, close to the border, a shelter for migrants. They have no interest to stay in Serbia. Some of them are offered housing, but their mind is set on marching forward into the safety of the Western promise. I look at them travel, in groups of three or four, walking with their backpacks, with the little they have. Only men. Their wives and children are not here, most of them are in shelters. Men risk everything just to cross the border here in this same place, in the place where I belong and do not belong. The point of tear. The border between Croatia and Serbia is the point of disintegration of my identity. Over and over again. Exposed. What is the difference between these two stretches of land? I belong to both and to none. The border: it did not even exist when I was 10. Now, it means everything. It means everything in the eyes of politics. It means everything to these

They march and we drive on, intersected through this point in time, this geographical area, this piece of land, intersected in our disillusionment of belonging. That is what ties us to this point in time and space. We are interconnected without them knowing it. I wonder whether some of them know that our people walked those same roads just two decades ago. Do they know that our own people, Serbians, Croatians, Bosnians were refugees on this same road as well? Do they know the history of this place they are trapped in? Do they have the strength, space, and time to wonder where they are? In most of their minds simply is the notion that Serbia and Bosnia are not in the EU and that is not their goal. I feel like stopping the car to tell them about the homelessness in the UK. I wonder whether what they are hoping for is also an illusion?

The State Border. Against the backdrop of the immigrant crises, I feel unease knowing that my husband is Nigerian, and I tell him that I understand the Croatian border police officer. It is Christmas and he is at work surrounded by migrants who are trying to cross against all odds. He does not want his life further complicated by our passports in three colours: red-Serbian, blue-Croatian and green- Nigerian.

The Serbian policeman asks us many questions. He is young. He looks at my husband's photo, then at him, again and again. "You can never know with these migrants", I joke with him. The irony of it all. He lets us pass.

The Croatian policeman looks at us in confusion. In Croatian he tells me that my husband has no visa, while looking at my passports, both Serbian and Croatian. I explain that he can cross the border with the UK residence card. He looks at it, then at my daughter's. He asks where my card is. I tell him I do not need it with Croatian passport. He is bewildered and surprised. He asks why my husband was denied access to Slovenia (our unsuccessful attempt to visit Venice Biennale in summer 1999). I told him that we have legal proceedings because we sued Slovenian government for not allowing us to travel through Slovenia. I point to the cakes I baked and explain that we only want to have Christmas lunch with my family in Croatia. We lived next door, before the war. He nods in understanding. I tell him that I understand if he cannot let us pass, in the light of circumstances. He starts apologising and tells me that they do not discriminate nor look at race, nationality, or colour. He simply follows regulations. His humble behaviour full of understanding tells me that some of us have learnt our lessons after the war. We do not want to discriminate. We are sick of that story. His superior arrives, tries to interpret the law. He says the UK is not in the EU anymore, referring to Brexit. "They are not out yet," I reply. After consulting the regulations, they finally give us the documents back and allow us entrance. "Sretan Bozic (Merry Christmas)", the policeman and I wish to each other.



Figure 45: The Three Passports, blue- Croatian, red- Serbian, green- Nigerian, autoethnographic photograph, 2019, border between Serbia and Croatia

We are finally leaving the highway and entering the heart of Croatia. which was previously the core of the warzone. A sense of tragedy still fills the air, or perhaps it is just my perception, as everything is peaceful, solemn, and empty. The sense of tranquillity is so intense that it almost feels unnatural. It is Christmas day and there are no people in the streets. Everything is guiet. If it was not for the war tokens, such as the still existing bullet holes, the people who do not know about the war would never guess what sort of horrors occurred in these areas during the 90s. 25 years after the Yugoslav war, some houses still bear this memory of war. These stubborn reminders are present everywhere: bullet holes, red houses-Serbian houses which were destroyed during the conflict and then rebuilt from the foundation (generous donations from the EU, as my cousins told me). Once destroyed, and now restored, these houses are symbols in more ways than one. They are silent reminders of terror, solemn, abandoned, and meaningless. Serbian families will never return to most of these houses, knowing how unwanted they were. These red houses in a row, aligned next to the road, are the actual proof of the number of Serbian people who lived in these villages in Slavonija, Croatia. They can be distinguished from the others by their echoing emptiness and ominous notices "FOR SALE" lurking from their windows.

Just those houses which were completely destroyed during the war were eligible to receive funds for reconstruction and renovation. The ones that still have bullet holes, 25 years after the conflict, are not repaired nor rebuilt, as no one lives in them. Anyway, rebuilt or not, they face the same destiny, abandoned, left and purposeless. The ghost-like atmosphere. Croatians would rarely buy these houses and they remain a sad and quiet reminder of what once was Yugoslav unity of brotherhood and equality.







Figure 47: The War Games, autoethnographic photograph, 2018, Daruvar, Croatia

As we pull over to photograph a locked and abandoned Serbian church, my feeling of dreariness of the atmosphere and emptiness of this sight seems overwhelming. No one bothered to repair it in the changed post-war circumstances. Today it has no purpose except that of a sad and ugly memory. The rhythmical bullet holes in its façade, form a sad and ugly image which reminds one of the divisions between Serbian and Croatian population during the Civil war.





Figure 48 and 49: The War Games, shelled Serbian Church, autoethnographic photographs, 2019, Slavonija, Croatia

Suddenly, I start feeling a sense of unease as some neighbours exit their houses looking at me take photos of a Serbian church. I assume they do not know I am Croatian, since my parked car has Serbian registration plates. They do not know that my great grandfather lost his life fighting on the Croatian side in the Second World War. They do not know that for me there was no possibility to choose a side in Serbo- Croatian conflict. The same thing occurs when I speak in the Serbian language while in Croatia. The language I learnt as a child was Serbo-Croatian and today there are slight differences between Serbian and Croatian, but they are still evident. As a child I spoke in today's dead language. How do you divide language? By prompting change and allowing time to take its course of action. Identity through language, national identity, and the sense of belonging through my mother tongue is not possible for me. My native tongue was Serbo- Croatian. How can I relate to terms "language" and "identity", as a Croatian who speaks Serbian? In Croatia, I feel unease while speaking Serbian. I can still feel this tension. The difference is obvious in some words. My cousins sometimes correct me while speaking, jokingly teaching me Croatian, which they had to switch to after being displaced. It was essential to integrate in the community. I did not lose my country and my sense of belonging to Yugoslavia only. For me, language is another feature lost in the Yugoslav conflict. Today I speak Serbian and they speak Croatian, my family members who lived next door for so long. Instead of having a clear understanding of what my native language is, as a primary feature which defines my belonging, I find myself dealing with confusion and disbelief.

By the 1960 Declaration of Novi Sad, the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia officially nominated Serbo- Croatian as an administrative language and since that day, by gaining a political function, the language which sprung from the popular movement of the People's Liberation Struggle, ceased being only the language of the masses. Serbo-Croatian by means of bi-national appropriation became the official language of the state apparatus and the instrument of unitarian policy of the Yugoslav government, although it was reduced to the language of only two of its nations, thus acquiring colonial properties in relation to the other Yugoslav nations, the native language of which was neither Serbian nor Croatian (Zdjelar and Stojanovic 2009, p.124). This usage of language and its political function became obvious features especially after the break- up of Yugoslavia. When visiting their neighbours, previous citizens of Yugoslavia face a complicated question of what language to use. This causes a "paralysing panic" that is hard to cope with (Zdjelar and Stojanovic 2009, p.125). In relation to this, in one of my travels to Croatia, I exchanged experiences with a Slovenian passenger who was around the same age as me. Slovenia, as a member state of Yugoslavia used the official language Serbo- Croatian, and consequently its citizens, those born to Yugoslavia, spoke its official language. It does not come as a surprise that while thinking in which language to address my fellow passenger, he replied in Serbo-Croatian. Unlike him, I could not understand Slovenian, and did not know a word of it. The same thing happened during the Feminist colony in Sicevo, Serbia, an art residency I participated in. One of the other participating artists was Macedonian, and even though the other girls could not speak her language, she communicated in Serbo- Croatian.

According to Zdjelar and Stojanovic (2009, p.127) "There is resistance in language when politics intervenes and thus it is impossible not to see that language has political effects. In other words, whenever politics takes language as a means, language returns the message to politics in a reversed form: You wanted a common language of all – Serbo- Croatian... No, you appropriated the language of all and made it a language that suppressed all. "

For me, revisiting the places in Croatia, through which my family travelled after being displaced, prompts me to re-question my identity, but it also makes me think of the quality of their emotional experience while leaving everything they knew and entering this new era of their lives, and their new home, situated in the demolished war zone. In a way, our traumas are connected, although they differ in intensity. For me revisiting these places means revisiting the space of my memory of my travels to the war-demolished Croatia as a child. To me it also brings memory of displacement, and it means reexperiencing trauma, encircling and integrating it as a part of my lived experience. Although this space did not affect me directly, as we managed to avoid being displaced, it did affect my thoughts, my emotions, and my identity. My cousins who lived next to me for 10 years of my life

were gone, and due to this, I experienced the feeling of emptiness after their displacement. I experienced the quality of a place as a non-place, simply by the mere absence of them. Three houses situated on one estate in my hometown Ruma, Serbia, once belonged to my great- grandfather. After his death the estate was divided among his children, my grandmother, and her siblings. After the displacement of my cousins, their two houses suddenly became foreign to me, their doors locked to us as some new people moved in.



Figure 50: My Street, Knjaza Milosa, Ruma, Serbia, 2003, photograph taken from the archive collection of The County Museum in Ruma, Serbia (image quality affected by age)

The Yugoslav war marked the end of generations of my family members who once inhabited this place. The emptiness I experienced was beyond the general sense of loss. For me, it represented the loss of the firm foundation of being situated within a place, tied to a piece of land your ancestors came from. Experiencing this understanding of place as a non-place of belonging, made me fully realise that I do not belong. Eventually, I left too, for what does this place of my childhood mean now, other than a memory of streets and people I sometimes see in my dreams? Therefore, I ask who can measure the quality of trauma? Although some aspects of it can be collective, different individuals experience same events in diverse ways.

1.3.2: Sunny Beach: Moments Remembered 7

A beautiful summer day on an isolated beach of Minerska in Croatia. It is one of those places that nature still preserved for itself, with the smell of pine trees filling the air and a scarce swimmer here and there. An overall atmosphere of peace and tranquillity.

We are collecting shells on the wonderful natural beach, and I am looking at my favourite cousin, fishing. This war has set us apart for so many years and I used to play with him when he was small. We lived next-door to each other and now I only get to see him on occasional visits to Croatia. The years that we could have spent together were taken away from us. I did not get to see him grow up because of war. Today I am happy to see him unharmed by war, fishing here in this peaceful place.

The tranquillity of the atmosphere is contrasted by a military base situated right behind us and the presence and existence of my cousin here, to me allows an inevitable comparison to young men who were occupying this space during the Yugoslav civil war. One more time, I reach an understanding of the fact that he could have been one of them, if only he was born a couple of years earlier. It is hard not to think about soldiers who spent their days inside the base. What was the quality of their thoughts while looking at the sea through the military base windows? Did they pray to come out and see the light of day again? It is unimaginable that bad things can happen in a place like this, where the sun shines so brightly and the sea gleams.



Figure 51: Room With a View, autoethnographic photographs, 2019, military base Minerska, Croatia



Figure 52: Room With a View, autoethnographic photographs, 2019, military base Minerska, Croatia

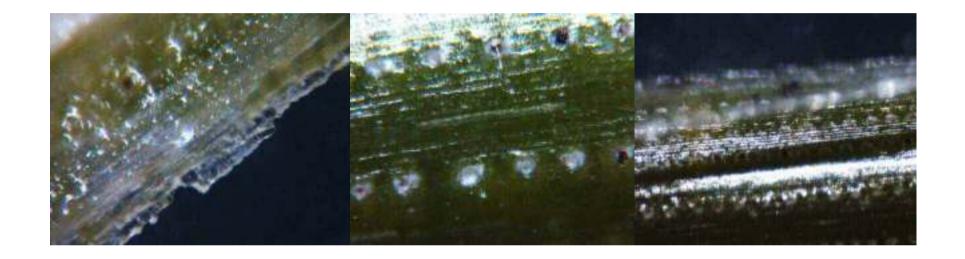


Figure 53: Pine needle, microscope photographs, magnification X1000, samples taken from Minerska beach, Croatia, 2021, Ruma, Serbia

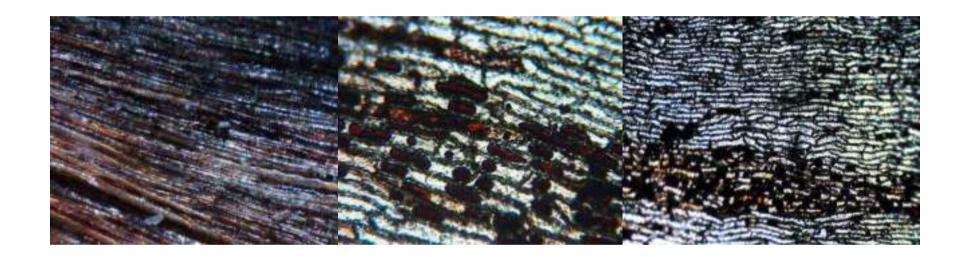


Figure 54: Pine seed, microscope photographs, magnification X1000, samples taken from Minerska beach, Croatia, 2021, Ruma, Serbia



Figure 55: Remove the Flesh, Alexa Come Back Home, autoethnographic photographs, 2019, military base Minerska, Croatia

I wonder how and whether this place marked the lives, destinies, and experiences of those soldiers during the war? It is still possible to see traces of them when entering the base, but it is hard to tell which graffiti and objects inside originate from them, and which were made for the purposes of a film about the Yugoslav Civil war, later created in this place. In one or the rooms, matrasses are still present, so I could imagine the soldiers' days in greater detail. The effect of the derelict space is emphasised by the ominous graffiti *Remove the Flesh* and *Aleksa, vrati se doma/ Aleksa, Come back home.*

This building is just one of many which faced the same destiny. 25 years after the Yugoslav Civil war ended and Yugoslav National Army left Croatia, many military facilities situated around the Croatian Coastal area are now empty and devastated. Today they have no purpose. The same destiny befell most government owned facilities in both Serbia and Croatia, with the consequences of war, destruction, and decay still present.

1.4: MY MEMORY, TRAUMA AND HEALING -SHIFTING PROPERTIES OF MEMORY

I would like to re-examine the theoretical concepts and definitions of trauma, filter them through my own traumatic experiences and investigate them by placing them in comparison to my personal understanding. I can only position these theoretical concepts in relation to my lived experience of trauma, in terms of my personal dealing with traumatic events. Therefore, I would like to test the validity of theoretical definitions of trauma, relate them to the elements of my personal experience and my narrative, explore and develop my position on trauma in the following chapter. I aim to investigate the shifting properties of places as sources of associations to my own memories and to use site writing as the methodology of this research, in order to test the quality of my memory. In the same way as physical properties of places change through time, so do my own memories and my emotional response to them, and in that sense, my understanding of traumatic events from my past.

My father is no longer alive, and the memories of derelict and war affected houses we saw through the train in Croatia when I was 11, today have a dreamlike atmosphere, and in my mind, they occupy a space between a dream and a nightmare. At times, it feels as if this memory is indeed a dream, due to how impossible for me it is to comprehend that something that awful could indeed be human reality. From my perspective as a child, it seemed unreal and unimaginable to face such destruction. Time took its course and today these houses are mostly repaired, but the remaining bullet holes are evidence that those events indeed were reality. Today, although many questions remain, with some certainty of a rational mind, I can grasp the circumstances of those events although the meaning evades me. Revisiting the space of my memories from a different perspective, as a grown woman, allows me to explore this shift in understanding and emotional response to my memories and it allows me an opportunity to test the qualities and properties of these memories.

1.4.1: Totality of My Existence: Moments remembered 8

If someone asked me what trauma is for me, I would not instantly think about the bad events from my war marked past. On the contrary, I would see myself on the corner of my street which was once called "Bratstvo i jedinstvo" (Brotherhood and Equality). It was a sunny autumn day, and the air was warm and cosy with the distinct smell of autumn. I was 8 or 9, a year or so before the war, and the autumn leaves rustled under my feet as I was walking to school.



Figure 56: Street of Brotherhood and Equality, autoethnographic photographs, 2021, Ruma, Serbia

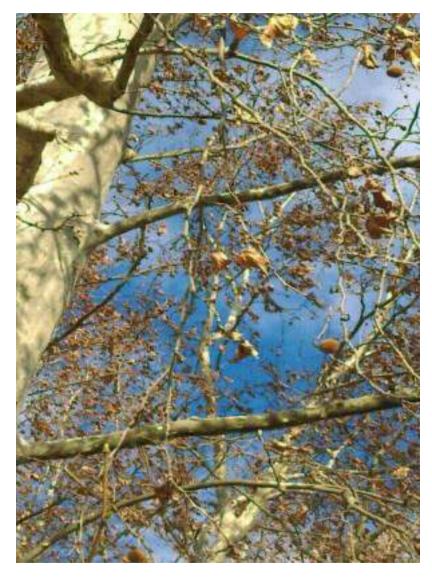


Figure 57: Treetop, autoethnographic photograph, 2021, Ruma, Serbia



Figure 58: Knjaza Milosa Street, autoethnographic photograph, 2021, Ruma, Serbia

Overnight, someone decided that the name "Brotherhood and Equality" was not a suitable name for my street anymore. The new ethnonationalist name emerged at our street corner and we found ourselves wondering how that was possible. It was not a bad name for us "Knjaz Milos", a 19th century Serbian leader, and my father being Croatian, would try to joke about it saying that our street was now called "Three hearts", referring to a slogan for a famous then Yugoslav and now Serbian mineral water. The company's name is "Knjaz Milos" too and it still exists in Serbia today.

Today, I understand how ironic it all is and that it is not the same world where we the Yugoslav people lived.

Quoting (Hodzic 2020) "Today ethnonationalism is a normal part of our lives, in language expression, songs and names of streets. The world in which we Yugoslav people lived, nurtured anti-fascist communism, which was inserted in the names of streets, inviting us to honour the achievements of anti-fascist battles, seen in the symbolic representation of Tito's images inside our homes, schools and other public institutions."

"Our street used to be named after a Yugoslav People's Hero, a Jewish anti-fascist and doctrinaire politician called Moše Pijade. We were taught to be proud of it, and I was. Soon after the war, the street was renamed after Ante Starčević, a late 19th century father of Croatian nationalism" (Hodzic 2020).

Therefore, ethnonationalism became a new reality in both Serbia and Croatia, and more or less, in all six constituent Yugoslav republics and it superseded the communist values which the Yugoslav people were prompted to nurture and support. Suddenly, the people around us, our neighbours who we spent our lives with, sat in our street with, in carefree hours of leisure, become alien to us, different from us, just because of our nationality. A unique sense of racism became our reality, the unwanted reality which crept up on us and caught my family off guard.



Figure 59: Franz W.,1990. *Gasse, (Alley),* Rumaer Dokumentation 1745- 1945 Mittelpunkt der deutschen Bewegungin Syrmien, Slavonien and Kroatien, Band 1, Herausgegeben von der Donauschwäbischen, Kulturstiftung Stuttgart, p.40 (photograph)



Figure 60: Franz W.,1990. *Traubenpressen (Grape Pressing)*, Rumaer Dokumentation 1745- 1945 Mittelpunkt der deutschen Bewegungin Syrmien, Slavonien and Kroatien, Band 1, Herausgegeben von der Donauschwäbischen, Kulturstiftung Stuttgart, p.31 (photograph)

As Hodzic (2020) states: "If home is a wound that splits open the world, the wound neither stays open nor heals over. The world rearranges itself. It doubles up on itself. It makes space for the unthinkable and the impure. We live under two moons. Survival dictates to casually deny this, but there are people everywhere who know the truth. I recognise fellow aliens and we nod to each other."

How do I feel today when I stand in the same corner?

For me, trauma is not a thing of the past. I still relive it whenever I visit what once used to be home. For a long time now, I have lived with the traumatic experiences which marked my past and the consequence of this is a constant attempt to retain sanity, to be functional even though, at times, half of me feels cut off.

At 3am, I still wake up, chasing these ghosts of past times, rearranging them in my mind, I sit together with my trauma. Trauma stays with me, shares my bed with me and visits me in the night hours. It lives with me, writes my narrative together with me, even when it feels warm and safe, and I can hear the quiet breathing of my daughter who is sleeping next to me. How does it feel? As time goes on, it stops being very painful, but becomes more of a stingy feeling. It never really goes away, but it burns less through years, days, and seconds, as it loses intensity, in the same manner as my memories which stop being so vivid.

I was evading to write the chapter about trauma, and I kept postponing this task until the very end of writing this narrative. This is probably the result of me not really wanting to face it, as not writing about it would mean not acknowledging it, not only to others, but to myself. It is equally hard to write about it, as it is to read other peoples' testimonies. I feel them deep in my core as if they are mine and some indeed are. We, researchers from Yugoslavia, share elements of this narrative. However, this does not come as a comfort or makes us such experts in the field of our research. It is simply sad to me, and my narrative feels as if I am selling parts of my soul.

For me, it is enough to recall my street corner and to say "Yes, it was warm then and thereafter, the winter came, cold winter, Serbian or Yugoslav, how I am to position myself accordingly?" Does it matter when it is cold, and you feel your bones freeze. The sense of childhood security and warmth is gone forever, and I accepted this as a fact.



Figure 61: The sense of childhood security and warmth gone forever, autoethnographic photographs, 2021, Ruma, Serbia



Figure 62: 1980 Winter, photograph taken from the archive collection of the County Museum in Ruma, Serbia (image quality affected by age)

By acknowledging this fact, I embraced my trauma and the memories originating from these places of my childhood are implicit and they do not affect my direct attention, nor influence my behaviour or cause strong emotional responses such as explicit memories would (Sanna and Chang 2006, p. 285). I connect the mentioned treatment of implicit memories to the idea of encircling trauma and integrating it as a part of my lived experience and I keep re-questioning these concepts in relation to my experience of dealing with trauma. At moments I feel as if I am a hypocrite, and that this idea is a hoax. Did I really integrate trauma as a part of me and to what level? At times, I feel ashamed writing this narrative as I was not raped, I did not watch my parents get killed and I was not physically displaced, despite the threat of this happening. Therefore, at times I feel as if I have no right to talk about the past, having heard the stories and knowing that there are people who have suffered much more than me. On the other hand, I feel that some of our traumas are interconnected. For example, I feel as if all the people in Yugoslavia share this mutual destiny of being expatriated, each in their own way, even if they did not get displaced in war. We have all lost our country, each of us in a different manner and in this sense our traumas bear a resemblance and differ at the same time. Therefore, we possess elements of collective trauma having been exposed to similar traumatic circumstances and what might be common to us is the idea about collective meaning making in trauma (Hirschberger 2018).

This idea of collective meaning making, and construction of my identity was also a difficult point in my case as I could not completely relate to any side in the conflict, since I belong to both and to neither at the same time. In a way I know that trauma shaped my sense of identity, but only up to a certain level and I could and did relate to the traumas I shared with the people in Serbia, although being Croatian. In more detail, I experienced the collective trauma inflicted by the bombing of Serbia in 1999, sanctions imposed on Serbia and hunger, poverty, and isolation resulting from exposure to these. However, I could not relate to the construction of the new Serbian national identity which at times required devaluation of other groups, such as Croatian minority groups in Serbia. In that sense, I was deprived of the full possibility of finding meaning in trauma. For this reason, the idea of going back to the place of trauma for the purposes of composing my narrative and then being miraculously cured by reexperiencing trauma, gave me hope, but that hope is the only substitute for my country, my family, my belonging, my identity, and the totality of my existence.

As a consequence of this inability to find meaning in my personal or in collective trauma, I experienced anger, an anger which would at times turn into rage caused by the feeling of injustice and my limited ability to understand why my country had to meet such destiny. Even though on a conscious level I knew why the war happened in theory, and who bombed us in 1999 and why, my inner being would often refuse to accept this reality. Therefore, I went into battle, against humanity, the people around me, and my own self, making sure that my system of defence is omni present and at my disposal in any circumstances, at all times.

However, I found elements of truth in the idea about encircling trauma. Integrating, in terms of accepting it as an integral part of my life and not fighting against its existence, is what I agree with. I rushed to get rid of my family house, I took the first opportunity, not because I did not love it but because I felt sickness, regret, anger and sorrow every time I would enter it. What did those walls mean to me when the people I loved were gone? Finally, sorrow, immense sorrow that threatened to swallow my whole being, superseded my rage. For me, sorrow is worse than rage. While in rage, I would fight back, but sorrow paralysed me. Sorrow is dangerous and it made me feel helpless and overflowed by grief and finally, depression knocked on my door. Eventually and with a lot of support, I picked myself up from the bottom to which the circumstances of my life took me. Nevertheless, am I truly functional today, at 3 am, sleep deprived, chasing ghosts while writing this narrative at night when my thoughts are most vivid? I managed to deal with traumatic experience, to an extent, and accept it as a fact, but getting rid of my family house never stopped hurting and I see my family in my dreams, alive, before the war when I was still a child, safe, secure, and happy.

Even though trauma builds resilience, this is a very relative condition, as not every individual possesses the same amount of ability to develop and maintain resilience. Something traumatic to one person can easily be narrated in an objective way by someone else. My ability to further build resilience seems to have decreased alongside with my need for it. As time went on, I became weary as I realised that life is not always necessarily a battle. I agree that resilience is an important factor, and it has played a valuable part in my lived experience, but resilience at what cost? At the cost of always being ready to fight back even when I fail to recognise the absence of danger. To me, simply put, the world became a risky, dangerous place in which I need to set my guard up and be ready to fight, constantly, without resting. Eventually I dried myself out, as I am getting older, I feel tired and I only long for peace within myself. In my opinion, this understanding of different aspects of my own resilience, for me, was a path towards healing.

Can practicing art and to which extent, help externalise my traumatic experiences? I want to believe so, as only while I am creating, do I experience rare moments of detachment from my thoughts. How otherwise but using microscope photography would I be able to convey the colour of my memory and the atmosphere of my life before and after the conflict. For me photography serves the purpose of giving emotional depth to my narrative and adding another angle to it. It visualises and complements my narrative and gives it a deeper meaning. In addition to this, it allows me to convey the structure of my dreams and inner, unspeakable reality which is a constituent part of my soul. Therefore, it helped me incarnate my trauma, however, for me, scars remain, and they are here to stay.

The publication *Uterus Effect* supported by the Cultural Department of the city Vienna, was released in March 2020 and it included my text *Art Therapy: Trauma and ways of dealing with it.* The publication is an experimental feminist endeavour which dealt with female reproductive health and artistic representations of it. It summed up analytical texts, free artistic forms and illustrations. For me it was an opportunity to present my vision of trauma and ways in which art can act as a catalyst and the healing factor in the battle for accepting trauma as an integral part of a lived experience.

The publication is the sum of analytical texts, illustrations, and free (artistic) forms that re-examine the relationship between art and maternity/reproductive system diseases. The content is divided into three parts: the first part covers analytical texts which, from different theoretical and methodological approaches, interpret topics such as motherhood dysfunctionality seen in the artist Tabita Rezaire's work titled "Sugar Walls Teardom" (text by Giulia Guaran), the maternal aspect of Virgin Mary (text by Jovana Pikulic), and the art therapy as a way of dealing with trauma (text by Ivana Mancic)" (Goodreads 2020).

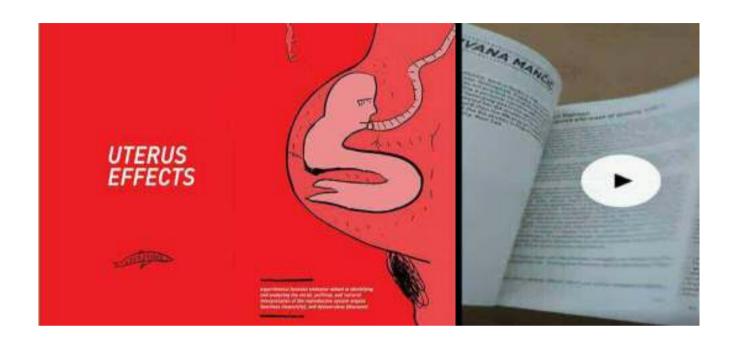


Figure 63: Uterus Effects, 2020, Verein Kustentropie, Vienna, Available at: https://fondacijasasamarceta.org/2020/05/11/uterus-effects/, Accessed 10th April 2021)



Figure 64: *Tree Seed*, microscope photographs, magnification X1000, samples taken from my street Knjaza Milosa, former Brotherhood and Equality, 2021, Ruma, Serbia



Figure 65: *Tree Seed*, microscope photograph, magnification X1000, samples taken from my street Knjaza Milosa, former Brotherhood and Equality, 2021, Ruma, Serbia

1.5: MY WORLD/STORY AS SEEN/EXPERIENCED THROUGH – COMMUNISM AND RELIGION

The features that define elements of one's identity such as nationality, geography, religion, and ethnicity, can at times seem blurry and unresolved, as these can be influenced by clashing ideas and beliefs. Such was the Yugoslavia case due to the simultaneous exposure to the communist ideology and religious belief which were mutually exclusive.

In that sense, the following chapter aims to shed light on my experience of the power of the communist system of belief in ex-Yugoslavia. Its purpose is to vividly sketch my relationship to the depth of the persuasion in the idea of belonging during Yugoslavia and the efforts to build and keep the Yugoslav myth alive. The photographs and personal items of my deceased family members serve as an artistic medium through which I presented their lives in communism.

Practice-based research is utilised to investigate my relationship to pre-war Yugoslavia by questioning the communist ideology and various religions tied to the specific sociocultural context I lived in and placing them in the juxtaposition with war. This chapter, by using photographs, medals, membership booklets, newspapers from the 1980s, Catholic and Orthodox crosses and other religious relics, investigates the culture and the society, in relation to mine and my family members' search for identity, as a part of our lives in Yugoslavia. My deceased family members' belongings are used as a source for exploration of this narrative, as they personally symbolise the broken dreams and promises of communism, whilst religion was misused by the nationalist discourse, during the Civil war in the nineties. Therefore, my aim is to present and share my artistic response to the Yugoslav social life and culture, but also to the issues surrounding my identity, belonging and loss, resulting from the exposure to the Yugoslav Civil War.

This part of the text has been published

1.5.1 My family and Trade Unions

In June 1950 the Yugoslav president Josip Broz Tito, introduced the law in *the People's Assembly* which addressed the issues of state ownership and thus established the self-management system. The aim was to democratise the workplace and give workers a direct voice to manage decisions (Robertson 2017). This meant that state ownership in terms of factories, mines and railways, gradually became social, as these were transferred into the hands of workers-proletarians, who were in charge of managing them (Hoxha 1978, p.20).

The 1963 Constitution pronounced self-management as the constitutional right of all people, and trade unions were defined as voluntary organizations. The main activities of trade unions were to develop self-management system within the organizations and enable intermediate roles and participation of workers in managing decisions around the workplace. One of the most important roles of trade unions was enabling the work hours to be restricted to 42 hours a week. In the beginning trade unions managed to do so in a small number of organizations but by 1964, they ensured that the same work hours were respected in all companies. Significant changes in the structures of trade unions occurred as well, and the 20 existing trade unions were amalgamated into 6. One of them was the *Industrial and Mining Workers Trade Union* (Sindikat 2011).



The news article from Sremske Novine. Ruma. Serbia dated 11th October 1978, which interviewed my grandfather, Petar Puskas, after receiving The Plaquette of Yugoslav Trade Union of Industry and Mining Workers, starts by explaining that when a 17-year-old shoemaker Petar Puskas, joined the trade union, cannons were still firing on the frontline and then freedom arrived. The article further states that the path of development of my grandfather's career was also the path of development of the factory he used to work in. In my grandfather's words they would work hard back then, with Sundays left for unpaid voluntary work. The Trade Union even initiated competition for the worker of the week which was judged by the amount of extra work hours. His efforts as a trade union member were aimed at helping his co-workers. If someone was sick, they would aid them financially. They would also distribute textiles or food items, which would arrive as a means of support and were otherwise either too expensive or hard to find. One of his dearest memories was the New Year they celebrated there, in the factory, as they went for the celebration straight from the workshop in their work uniforms (Poznanovic 1978).

The award meant a huge acknowledgement both for him and for their factory. The article states that he was awarded the plaquette for extraordinary long-term work. The fact that his work was recognised gave him great pleasure and pride as that award was not something one would receive every day (Poznanovic 1978).

Figure 66: The Plaquette of Yugoslav Trade Union of Industry and Mining Workers, autoethnographic photograph, 2019, Ruma, Serbia



Figure 67: Thread, microscope photograph, magnification X1000, samples taken from my grandad's work uniform, 2021, Ruma, Serbia

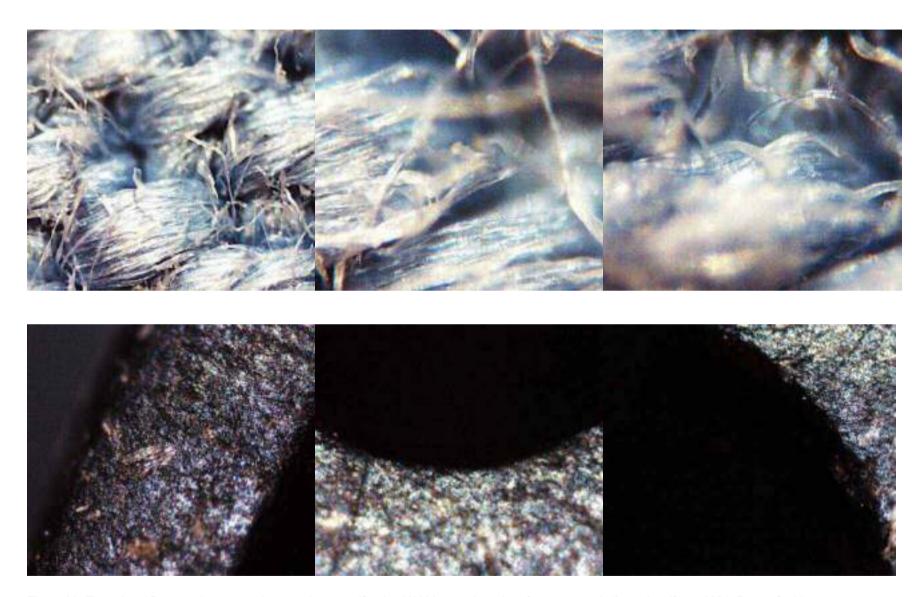


Figure 68: Thread and Button, microscope photographs, magnification X1000, samples taken from my grandad's work uniform, 2021, Ruma, Serbia

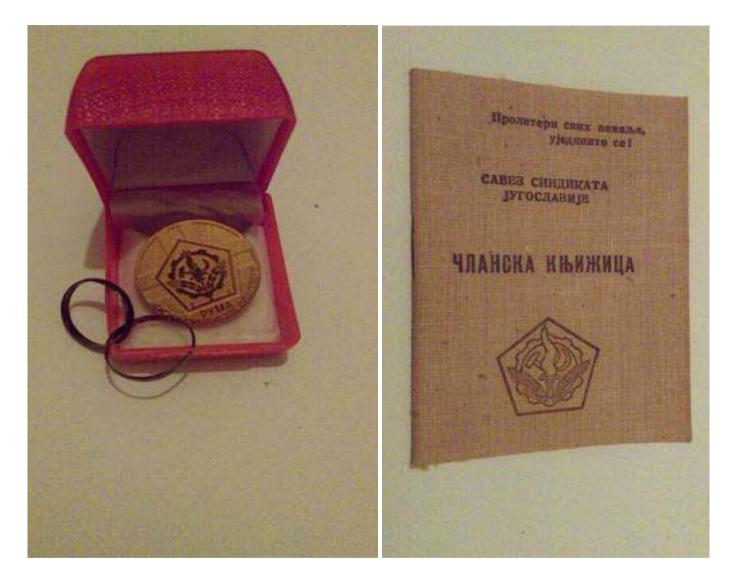


Figure 69: Trade Union of Workers medal, (left) and a Membership booklet (right), autoethnographic photographs, 2019, Ruma, Serbia

The photographs above testify of my grandparents' membership to the Trade Union of Workers and show a jewellery box containing a medal with the inscription *Trade Union of Workers Ruma, Serbia,* and the Trade Union's Coat of arms and two wedding rings inside. The rings belonged to my grandparents, a working-class couple, and were crafted from silver which was an affordable material, while the Membership booklet on the left displays the communist slogan: Proletarians of all countries unite!

The inside of the booklet contains the name and surname of my grandfather, Petar Puskas, his profession- shoemaker, his year of birth 1923, the date of joining the Union 26/01/1945, the date of the first membership fee collection 01/01/1956 and the stamp of an authorised official.

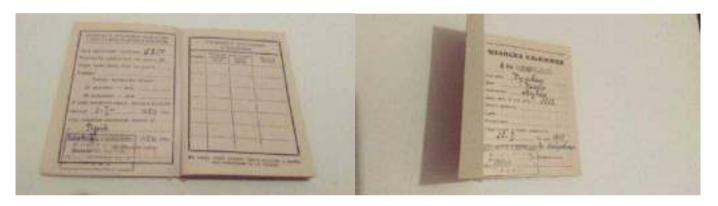


Figure 70: The inside of the booklet with name and surname of my grandfather, Petar Puskas, profession- shoemaker, autoethnographic photograph, 2019, Ruma, Serbia



Figure 71: Membership fee for the Trade Union of Workers, collected on monthly basis, autoethnographic photograph, 2019, Ruma, Serbia



Figure 72: Workday in a shoe factory, my grandfather on the right, photograph from my family's personal collection, 2019, Ruma, Serbia (image quality affected by age)

Communist self- management ideology celebrated workers as producers who use their hands to create products, while all other groups of the society lived off their back (Grdesic 2008, p.10). This was one of the features of Yugoslav communism, this need to praise a worker as an important part of the production chain. Trade Unions, on the other hand, made attempts toward increasing productivity and improving the standard of living for workers. In my opinion workers like my grandad were tricked by the system they believed in, since equality was an illusion, as shown in the photo above in which my grandad is wearing a white apron and holding a pair of newly made shoes for inspection. For me, this photograph represents what communism truly was, a cunning way to make people work for someone else and it hurts me to see my grandfather so humble and obedient as he seems in the photograph.

I believe that although the basic premises of communism aimed to equalise every member of the society, this was a paradox, as in reality, things were quite the opposite. Tito was a locksmith by occupation and the citizens of Yugoslavia never questioned, at least not openly, his extravagant lifestyle, his luxurious yachts, foreign travels, mansions, and friendships with other world leaders (Mackenzie 2017). Even today, in Serbia I can hear people say how every leader stole from the working class, but Tito at least gave us something in return. Today I can imagine how life must have been unbearable for intellectuals, which is evidenced in the fact that many people left Yugoslavia, while those who rebelled openly, ended up in political prisons which were actual concentration camps, such as *Goli Otok* in Croatia. *Goli Otok* was once described as a "living hell" (Radiosarajevo.ba 2017) by those who were unlucky enough to be sent to that prison.



Public elections were organised during Yugoslavia, but today I ask myself what the point was to organise elections during Yugoslavia, when there was only one, and the one and only ruler. Nevertheless, the elections were held, and my grandad voted as was expected of him.

I also understand that opinions on Yugoslavia are often conflicted as according to Baric (2020) "Of course, the full story of Yugoslavia is not so simple, and nostalgia has a tendency to blur out the unsavoury details. Yugoslavia provided for its citizens in many ways. However, while its leader was sometimes a benevolent dictator, he was sometimes a brutal authoritarian. The patriotism he demanded verged on brainwashing, and critiques of his regime were not tolerated. Those who fell out of favour with the Communist Party could find themselves in a labour camp".

Regardless of this, according to *Politika* newspaper, Belgrade, Yugoslavia, dated the 4th of May 1980, the day Tito died, his funeral was attended by over 100 rulers from all around the world.

Figure 73: Public elections during Tito rule, my grandfather voting, photograph from my family's personal collection, 2019, Ruma, Serbia (image quality affected by age)



Figure 74: *Tito and Yugoslavia are one*, photograph, *Politika* newspaper, 4th May 1980, the day Tito died," Tito and Yugoslavia are one", autoethnographic photographs, 2019, Ruma, Serbia

1.5.2 The Orders of Yugoslavia in my Experience and Understanding

Medals and orders bearing the name of Yugoslavia are numerous and they can be found all around the world. This fact testifies to how much Tito enjoyed giving out orders and medals. During his rule around 3 million were forged. Leaders of various countries, diplomats, artists, dictators, soldiers and even one God were decorated with these medals. One of the proud bearers of *The Order of Yugoslav Big Star* was Ethiopian emperor Haile Selassie, who was also pronounced to be a God by the worshipers of Rastafari movement, a religious movement that has around a million followers, mostly in Jamaica (Dragovic 2011).

The order of the highest rank for a foreign national, *The Order of Yugoslav Big Star*, was awarded to a Romanian dictator Nicolae Ceauşescu. Among those decorated were also the Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi, the last Iranian Shah Reza Pahlavi, Bulgarian president Todor Zhivkov, the fifth leader of the Soviet Union Leonid Brezhnev, Albanian Prime Minister Enver Hoxha, Emperor of Central Africa Jean-Bédel Bokassa, Austrian President Kurt Waldheim and even members of Apollo 11 Mission- Neil Armstrong, Edwin Aldrin, and Michael Collins. These orders, intended for foreign nationals, were very valuable as they were created using expensive materials. Tito himself liked to wear many decorations which testifies to the value and importance dedicated to them.

The production of orders, decorations, and medals of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia started after the Second World War and continued throughout the whole existence of Yugoslavia. By 1960 the number of decorations drastically increased, including additional 35 orders, 6 medals and 1 commemorative medal. Antun Augustincic and Djordje Andrejević-Kun were the designers of the Yugoslav orders and medals (Dragovic 2011).



The five- pointed star which was the official feature of the Yugoslav flag as well as the sickle, were frequent symbols and elements of design in most Yugoslav medals and orders.

On the 1st of May 1945 the Presidency of the Anti- Fascist Council of People's Liberation of Yugoslavia established the system of awarding the distinct citizens of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. There was a system of order determined by the level of importance of an achievement. The award was intended for individual citizens, organizations of joint labour and the members of the armed forces of FRY, who achieved special accomplishments in economy, peace, or well-being, and thus performed work of special significance for the progress of the country. *The Order of Labour with Silver Wreath* is the 33rd in the order of decorations and was awarded for distinct results in performed work, with the total amount of 182,910 of these orders given out (Siliegovic and Todorovic, 1985).

Figure 75: Tito's photograph with communist slogan, Proletarians of all countries unite! and communist symbols, five-pointed star with a sickle and a hammer, photograph from my family's personal collection, 2019, Ruma, Serbia



Figure 76: Order of Labour with silver wreath, with sickle and hammer, the symbol of communism, autoethnographic photographs, 2019, Ruma, Serbia

The Order of Labour was awarded for contributions aimed towards the efforts in building communism, production, and economy. Three levels of importance existed: The Order of Labour with Red Banner, which was the order of the first class, The Order of Labour with Gold Wreath which belonged to the second class and The Order of Labour with Silver Wreath with the importance of the third class. The Order of labour with Red Banner was made of silver and the other two of copper and zinc, while The Order of Labour with Gold Wreath had a gold-plated wreath, and The Order of Labour with Silver Wreath had a silver-plated wreath. The design of the latter two orders was very much alike, displaying a male and a female worker holding a flower, placed inside the central relief. Behind them is an open book with the gold-plated sickle and hammer. The relief is placed on the five-pointed star with a diameter of 45 mm, with ends resembling a gear wheel (Kokosar 2012).



Figure 77: Certificate of the order awarded, issued by the Presidency of the Anti-Fascist Council of People's Liberation of Yugoslavia, Office for Medals, Belgrade, 1980, autoethnographic photograph, 2019, Ruma, Serbia

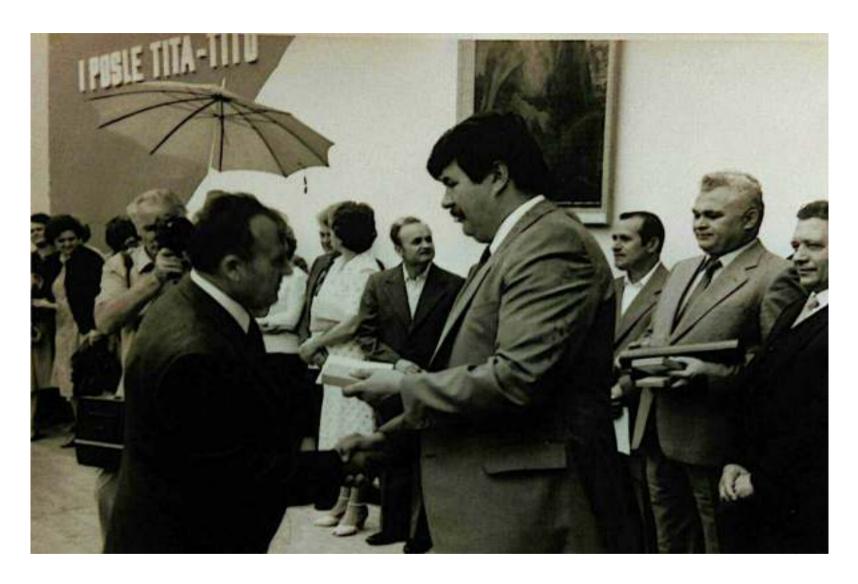


Figure 78: The ceremony of decorating the distinct members of the communist party with orders of labour, 1980, my grandfather, left, receiving the order, photograph from my family's personal collection, 2019, Ruma, Serbia

The Order of Labour with Silver Wreath was awarded to my grandfather Petar Puskas, on the 31st of December 1980. For the people who received these highest orders and medals, they were priceless.



My grandfather is long gone, but I sometimes imagine how he must have felt then, to finally receive the recognition he craved for all his life, because, in my opinion, the sense of shame never really left him. He never spoke of it, but I know that he was ashamed of the side his father fought on in the Second World War. This reward made him proud, and I strongly believe that 1980 was the best year of his life. I was born just two weeks before the date when he received the award, and I feel that he transmitted this joy to me, and he loved and protected me all his life. My dearest memories are connected to my granddad, and I remember his silver motorcycle, produced in Yugoslavia, and I remember how he would always bring me candy. He was the light in my life and communism and me, were the same in his.

I grew up in a family that truly and deeply believed in the communist ideology, or at least my grandad did. Today, I find myself in an age where I experience overall disbelief and crises of values, where I face disillusionment in every segment of my life, where values are questioned, and then re-questioned again. Today, I live in a world in which we are exposed to threats by viruses, clashes of economies, trade, and power systems, thus to me it seems almost impossible to understand the true devotion to anything, especially to a political system such as communism. The power of persuasion in these people is incomprehensible to general contemporary belief. Communism had that power and people blindly and faithfully obeyed.

Figure 79: My grandad and me, 1981, photograph from my family's personal collection, 2019, Ruma, Serbia (image quality affected by age)



Figure 80: My grandparents and me, 1986, photograph from my family's personal collection, 2019, Ruma, Serbia (image quality affected by age)



Figure 81: Decorated citizens and their wives posing under the slogan "And after Tito, Tito" photographs from my family's personal collection, 2019, Ruma, Serbia



Figure 82: Decorated citizens and their wives posing under the slogan "And after Tito, Tito" photographs from my family's personal collection, 2019, Ruma, Serbia

If from my perspective today, I make an effort to realise what life was like for people like my family members, during the communist regime, I might acknowledge what being rewarded in the system where people would work for free to build a country and its economy, actually meant. Being rewarded meant that your existence and efforts made a difference, therefore, the value of decorations could not be measured in money. This strength of belief is a feature I have never experienced again, and that makes me see the dissolution and the clash of Yugoslavia so deeply sad and ruthless at the same time.

To some of the offspring of these communist workers and the Second World War heroes, unlike myself, who still proudly cherishes this reminder of my grandfather and his efforts, these decorations are worthless, and today they represent just pieces of metal that can be bought online. They can be acquired for small sums of money at the military waste spots, flea markets and antique shops, depending on the country, with the cheapest ones for sale in Serbia and Macedonia, and the most expensive in Slovenia. According to one of the images I found, *The Order of Labour with Silver Wreath* which belonged to the 1945-1980 period, can be bought for the sum of 20 € (Joksic 2016).

As I witnessed, with the death of brotherhood and equality, the value and importance of these orders perished as well. Today, they are valued only according to the price of the material they are made of, while the design, even though it was made by acknowledged artists, remains completely irrelevant (DanOnline 2018).

Although orders such as *The Order of Labour with the Silver Wreath* are falling to oblivion today, and are quite worthless, they are still relevant in the sense that they tell a story, as behind every decoration there is a valuable, individual story that conveys respect, efforts, and history.

Resulting from my writing and research about the Yugoslav medals and orders, my article *The Order of Labour with Silver Wreath and the Plaquette of Yugoslav Trade Union of Industry and Mining Workers*, was accepted for publishing in the Journal of the Orders and Medals Research Society. The Journal was released at the end of 2020, and it contains an autoethnographic research on my grandfather's engagement in the fight for better rights of workers and his work commitments during the communist rule in Yugoslavia. It describes the communist ideology and the strength of belief among these people whose aim was to build the country and better future for Yugoslav people.



1.5.3 Old Market in Skopje, North Macedonia: Moments Remembered 9

It is 2020 and I am on the Macedonian border, on my way to a conference in Skopje, with a negative PCR Coronavirus test result required from Serbian citizens. I joke about the test prices (50€ in Serbia, 65 in Macedonia) with the other passengers while exiting the bus to have our documents checked. Funny though, the language is not the same, but we do understand each other, and with the adequate effort on both sides, there is no need for English at this point. Macedonian citizens do not need a test, Serbian do, and vice a versa on the return trip. All of us once belonged to Yugoslavia and today, in the light of new circumstances, this seems irrelevant. We stand outside, waiting for the Macedonian border police to return our documents. To me, this very fact that when crossing the border with one of the ex-Yugoslav countries, we need to go through the ceremony that follows the border procedure, such as leaving the bus, standing in a queue, waiting, exposed, answering questions, is above ridiculous. I still remember Yugoslavia and the pledge to keep our unity, or as the slogan says: "Keep our brotherhood and equality, as an iris of your eve."

Figure 83: "Long live 29th November, Yugoslavia's birthday", my grandad Miroslav Kvaic, on the right, under the slogan: "Keep our brotherhood and equality, as an iris of your eye" photograph from my family's personal collection, 2019, Ruma, Serbia (image quality affected by age)



On my arrival, the taxi driver takes me on a night tour through Skopje. I still did not get to change my money from (Serbian dinar) to (Macedonian denar), but he is willing to take dinars too. He drives me through the city centre, shiny with sculptures ("Loan" he says) and leaves me in front of some hotel, far from where I am supposed to be. He takes my money and disappears. This makes me ask myself how do Macedonian people live now, 30 years after Yugoslavia? Probably not much different than the people in Serbia- far from the shine and glory of the Yugoslav communist promise.

The next day, I am determined to find the shop described in the news article I read about Yugoslav's sad promises and broken dreams, and I endeavour to visit the Old Market in Skopje. It is not easy to find the place, as there are a couple of shops that sell antiques, but after I say the name of Stoile Trajkovski, three kind men, who are sitting and having coffee outside one of many antique shops, show me the way. "You will find it easily", they say. "It has a Yugoslav flag in front."

Before I leave, one of these men who is also a shop owner, welcomes me to his shop and shows me the Yugoslav items he has. The Yugoslav flag is there too. Among the items, I see the order of labour and tell him that I have one of those and that it belonged to my grandad. He replies: "Everyone who worked a little bit during Yugoslavia, had one of those"

Figure 84: Partisan and Pioneer caps with Yugoslav red star, autoethnographic photograph, 2020, antique shop, Old Market, Skopje, North Macedonia



Figure 85: Yugoslav flag, autoethnographic photograph, 2020, antique shop, Old Market, Skopje, North Macedonia



Figure 86: Yugoslav flag and a man begging, autoethnographic photograph, 2020, Old Market, Skopje, North Macedonia

Finally, I find the store, and the flag is really there, symbolically placed behind the man who is begging in the street. I relate deeply with this sight, as to me it symbolises the end of Yugoslav values. Who are we today? The citizens of glorious Yugoslavia- ready to scam each other over 5€ and in need to beg? I do not remember seeing this when I was a child. It simply would not merge well with Tito's display of power and might.

Quoting Baric, 2020 "This tension between oppression and freedom from want in the former Yugoslavia can be difficult to reconcile, and sometimes it is easier to focus on its brotherhood and unity, rather than its one-party rule and war. My dad will acknowledge this, but still owns a t-shirt with Tito's face on it. Sometimes he wears the shirt under a polo, like a Superman costume ready to be unveiled when pluralism is threatened, and nationalism rears its ugly divisive head. When he finds the right audience, he will reveal his shirt with a mischievous twinkle in his eye. This is the bold vision we once had, he seems to be saying. This is what we gave up for nationalism."

In the store, I meet Trajkovski's son in law. He tells me the sad news that the old man has cancer and is very ill. He is an art historian, and I knew that that man has stories to tell. The surrounding shop items evidence this.

"He is too sick for visits", with these words, the door to the memories of this man closes in front of me. The old generation of Yugoslav people who shared a communist dream is slowly vanishing for me to witness this.



Figure 87: Detail with Tito's drawing among the shop inventory and Yugoslavia Army Military Academy Officer's Uniform, autoethnographic photographs, 2020, Old Market, Skopje, North Macedonia

This part of the text has been published



1.5.4 My experience of Women in Communism

To illustrate life during Yugoslavia, I gave a lot of attention to the emancipation of women, for which the period after the Second World War was extremely important. The main postulates of the new-born political systems which insisted on class equality also included equality between women and men. The fact that women fought in the front lines, side by side with men, allowed the basic steps of emancipation. Most of them were engaged as nurses, but those that participated in the combat with male combatants were the ones who conquered another sphere of the public domain and ensured the future position of women in public life. Leaving the house to go to work, they potentially managed to conquer the sphere of the public domain during the communism (Pantelic 2011, p 81).

After the FRY (Federal Republic of Yugoslavia) proclaimed the Five-Year plan of rebuilding the country from the consequences of war, there was an increased need for more work force (Spahic, Zdralovic and Aganovic, 2014). In these new circumstances, women gained special importance. They participated in actions of voluntary work on rebuilding the country. These voluntary actions organised by the Communist party of Yugoslavia allowed and welcomed women to build roads, railways and perform work in the factories. The needs of fast industrial development required women to leave housework and enter the public sphere. As the sudden emancipation made women feel that their work was appreciated and respected, they posed no questions of being paid and were ready to work for free, thus becoming the most favoured work force of the new socialist political order (Dijanic, Goluvic and Niemcic, 2004, p. 318).

Figure 88: Voluntary Action in 1977 Yugoslavia, on the left my mother with a friend, photograph from my family's personal collection, 2019, Ruma, Serbia (image quality affected by age)

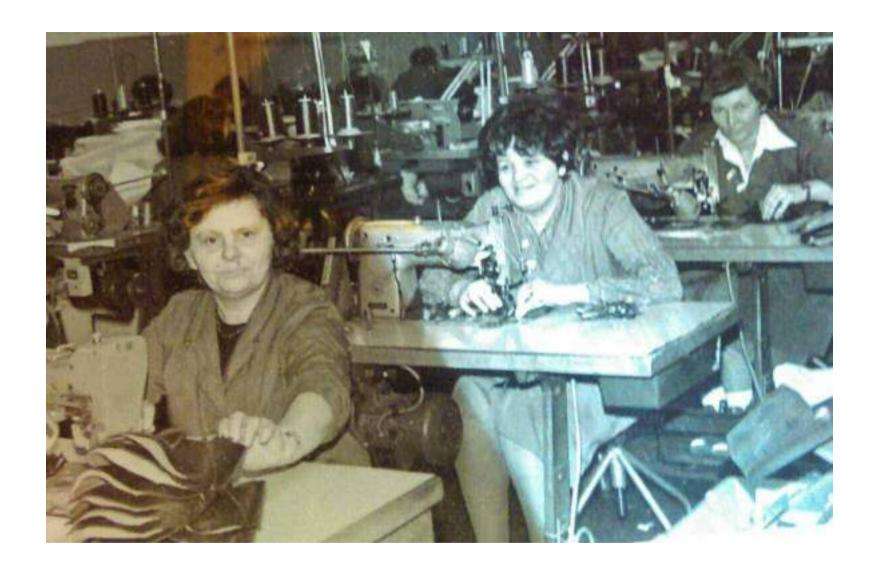


Figure 89: Shoe Factory "Fruska Gora", Ruma, Yugoslavia, my grandmother Kvaic Milica with colleagues working, photograph from my family's personal collection, 2019, Ruma, Serbia (image quality affected by age)

In retrospect, what seemed like emancipation during communism, actually meant that in reality most women spent their lives working in both the public sphere and in their homes. Some factories introduced worker's cards in which all the extra work hours would be noted, and every worker was expected to work a certain amount of overtime hours. Both of my grandmothers worked their whole life in a shoe factory, and after the hard work they used to perform, their workday would not be over. It would just continue in their homes. Their workload did not only include taking care of their children and house chores, but also agriculture, as they produced most of their food.

My experience of what emancipation offered to women is restricted to the mere belief that they were equal to men only so that they could work even harder and at that cost feel respected.



Figure 90: The inside of the Female Worker's Card Shoe Factory "Fruska Gora", Ruma, 1947 Yugoslavia, with the name of my grandmother Rakos Mara, autoethnographic photographs, 2019, Ruma, Serbia



Figure 91: My grandmother in 1944, age 16 working in a shoe factory, photograph from my family's personal collection, 2019, Ruma, Serbia (image quality affected by age)



Figure 92: Women and Tito, my grandmother, Marija Puskas, second on the right, with colleagues, Ruma, photograph from my family's personal collection, 2019, Ruma, Serbia (image quality affected by age)

Despite the fast emancipation of women in socialism, the subsequent reestablishment of the old premises of the patriarchal society and the rise of nationalism soon followed. This preceded the armed conflicts in the nineties (Spahic, Zdralovic and Aganovic, 2014). The ways in which women were treated depended on circumstances and needs of the society and therefore the road of emancipation was not linear but rather turbulent. The relatively peaceful period in the Balkan history, since the end of the Second World War to the armed conflicts in the nineties, was marked by the jump from the patriarchal values to the sudden emancipation of women. This ostensible emancipation was followed by the subsequent decadence through the reinvention of the patriarchal values for developing nationalist discourse, which preceded the Yugoslav Civil War (Drakulic and Licht 1996).

Even today, in the era of the migrant crises, with refugees being stuck in Serbia in their attempts to cross the borders with European Union countries, women are remembered again, in frequent, amplified narratives about the refugee men who are attacking "our women" (Todorovic 2021). In my opinion, this hypocritical relationship towards women occurred in the communist Yugoslavia and is still present today. From the experience of the women around me, my mother, grandmothers, neighbours, and mine, I can conclude that women have been dragged into the political circumstances of their time, and as such simply coexisted with war, hunger, crises, usually deprived of agency, and therefore I believe that writing this narrative is important. The process of composing my story calls for agency through my voice as a female witness of The Yugoslav Civil war.

As for my grandmother, regardless of the circumstances of her life, she managed to find some peace within herself, and a sense of order in chaos. She was the one who raised me, and I grew up in a strange blend of two contrasting sets of beliefs. I cannot say that in my experience religion in Yugoslavia was totally forbidden, but it was definitely not respected nor encouraged. My grandmother was raised in a strict Catholic manner, and in some sense, religion did give her peace. For her, religion was what communism was for my grandfather. Sundays were the days she would take me to mass. All through Tito's rule and afterwards, our house was filled with Catholic relics, crosses, religious statues, and prayer books. Even though she respected the communist premises, she never stopped praying. On her death bed, regardless of the severe dementia, she would pray. That is how she died, in a silent prayer, frequently interrupted by her making the sign of cross.

In a mixture of religious and communist belief, our lives went on and eventually ceased to exist, with religion prevailing, frequently in the political sense. Moreover, religion did not only remain, but in my perspective, it managed to gain revenge for the Yugoslav years in which it was neglected, as it was a premise of the forthcoming civil war.

In September 10-12, 2020, I was selected as a participant, awarded residency, and offered scholarship during the Xenofeminism, School for Politics and Critique, Skopje, North Macedonia, and during this international conference I was a presenter on the topic of *Outside of Memories We Belong, Women of Yugoslavia* and this was an opportunity to test how to best present autoethnography and photographic practice. This was a fruitful experience, not only in terms of testing how image and spoken word work together, but also, subsequently my presentation during the conference led to the writing up of an article *Outside of Memories We Belong, Women of Yugoslavia*, accepted for publishing in *Identities: Journal for Politics, Gender, and Culture*, Institute of Social Sciences and Humanities – Skopje, 2020, North Macedonia. Available at: https://doi.org/10.51151/identities.v17i2-3

The article contains an autoethnographic research on the emancipation of women in Yugoslavia and the position of women in the communist system through the lens of experiences of my female family members.

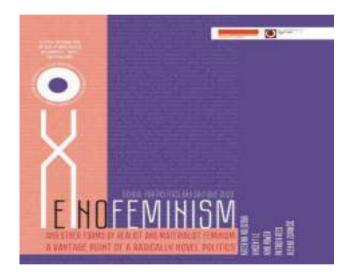


Figure 93. Xenofeminism, School for Politics and Critique, 2020, Skopje, North Macedonia



Figure 94: An Orthodox and a Catholic cross, autoethnographic photographs, 2019, Ruma, Serbia



Figure 95: Memory of the first communion, Ivan Puskas, my father, 1956, Ruma, autoethnographic photograph, 2019, Ruma, Serbia



Figure 96: *Memory of the first communion*, Lanc Zvonko, my uncle (up); my grandmother with her sister (down), Kingdom of Yugoslavia, autoethnographic photographs, 2020, Ruma, Serbia



Figure 97: Catholic religious items: Virgin Mary, St Nikola, pray for Croatian people; postal stamp with St Sava, Orthodox saint, Virgin Mary, an item for prayer, autoethnographic photographs, 2019, Ruma, Serbia

1.5.5 My Personal Space within Identity Definition

Writing my narrative enabled me to critically examine the complexity of the notion of identity, and above all, it allowed me to filter through my experiences in the search for identity. For the first time in my life, I understood how futile the search for identity is and having lost it once, I became disillusioned. Writing my narrative opened my eyes to this fact.

1.5.6 First Day of School, 1986: Moments Remembered 10

For the children of communism, like myself, there was no such thing as the national identity of Serbians, Croatians, or Muslims. We were Yugoslavs. I remember the first day of school in 1986. I was a small girl with a pioneer hat. Even though Tito died, the ideal still existed for the next ten years. Children wore those pioneer hats and red scarves around their necks. We were so proud of these symbols of our belonging. I remember standing among other students with the Yugoslav flag waving in the wind above our heads, as we were being welcomed to our school days. I was too young to define it as such, but if I ever felt the sense of belonging, it was on that day.

Wearing a red scarf and a blue pioneer hat meant pride. It meant that we, the young people of Yugoslavia, give our pledge to the values of our country, and it was also a promise of our future loyalty to Tito and the communist party. Above all, it meant being integrated in the community, feeling as if this political belonging was our purpose, as something that defines us as valuable members of the society, something heart-warming. Perhaps this notion that is hard to explain to me, from this perspective, was a merger of patriotism on one hand and belonging on the other.



Figure 98: *Tito's pioneers, during a school play*, around 1984, with my mother at the back as a teacher, "Ivo Lola Ribar" elementary school, Ruma, photograph from my family's personal collection, 2019, Ruma, Serbia

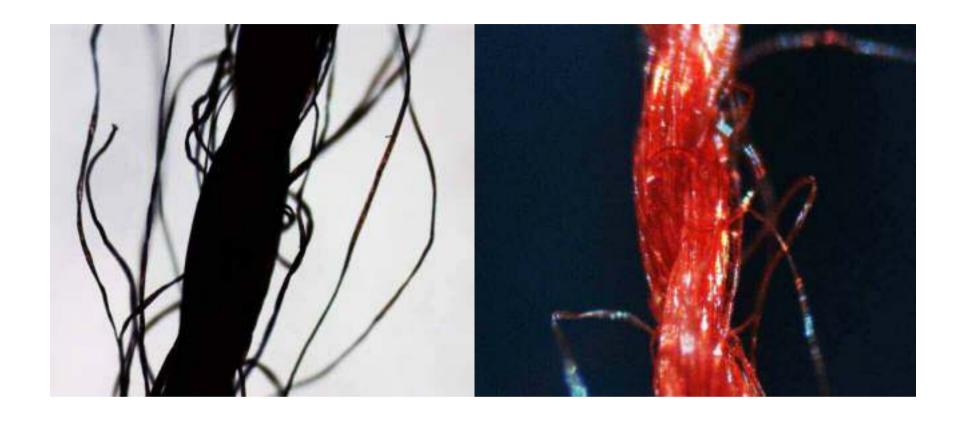


Figure 99: Thread from a pioneer scarf, microscope photographs, magnification X1000, 2021, Ruma, Serbia

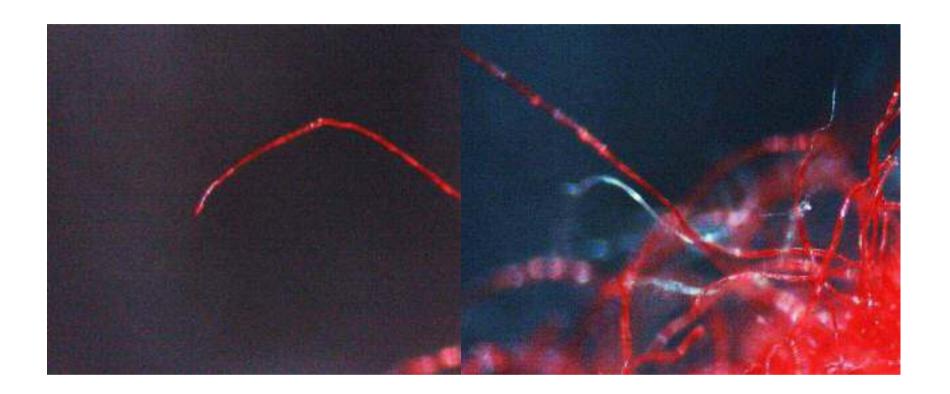


Figure 100: Thread from a pioneer scarf, microscope photographs, magnification X1000, 2021, Ruma, Serbia

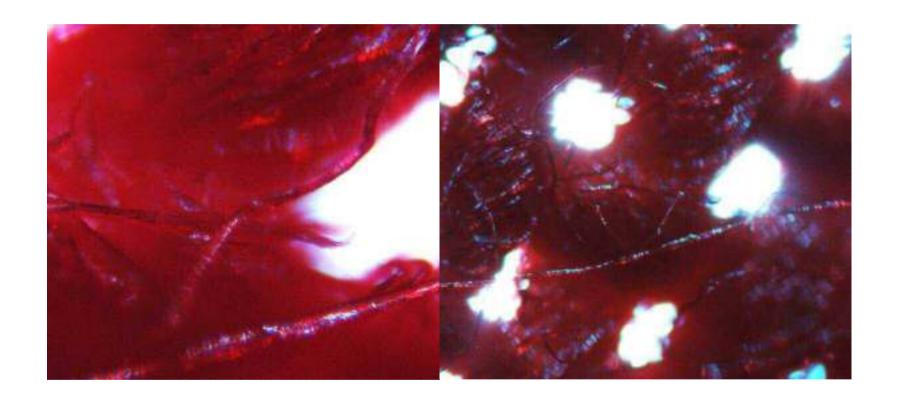


Figure 101: Thread from a pioneer scarf, microscope photographs, magnification X1000, 2021, Ruma, Serbia

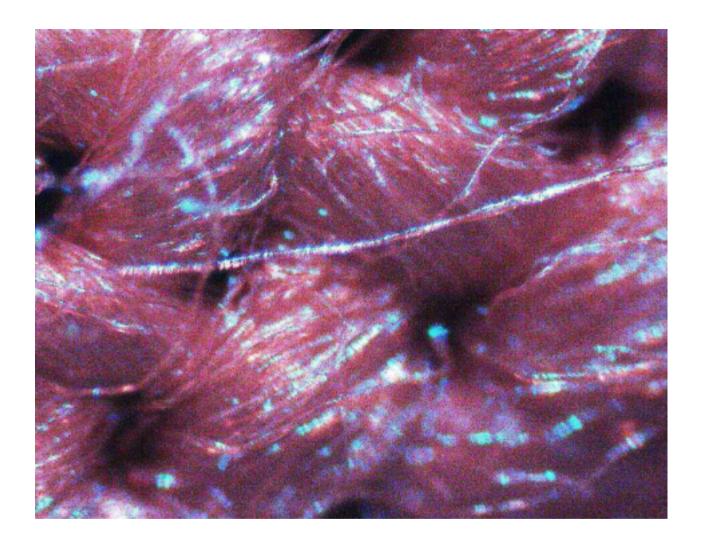


Figure 102: Thread from a pioneer scarf, microscope photograph, magnification X1000, 2021, Ruma, Serbia

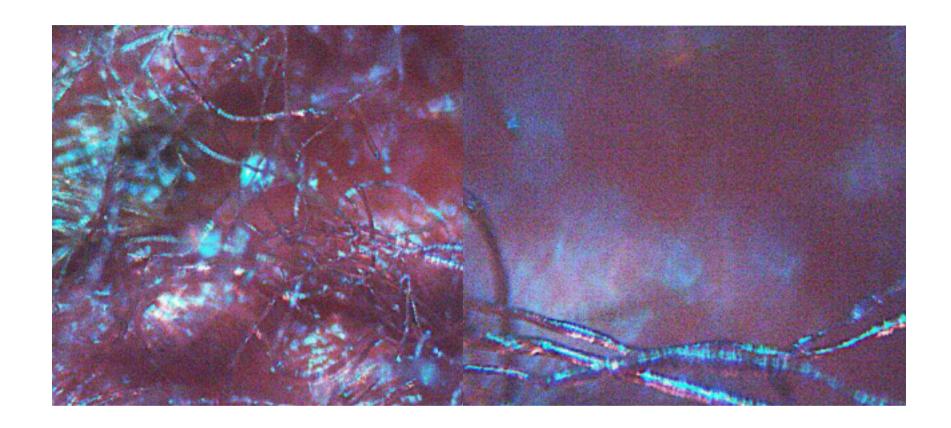
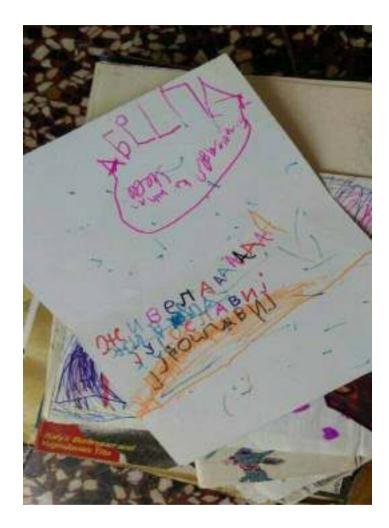


Figure 103: Thread from a pioneer scarf, microscope photographs, magnification X1000, 2021, Ruma, Serbia



Communism was an integral part of my childhood, and as such it was as important as my family. When other young children learn how to write, some of their first written words are most probably Mum or Dad, but for me those words were:" Long live Yugoslavia", as shown in the old postcard I found on my family house attic, after my father passed away.

Figure 104: Old postcard with the writing:" Long live Yugoslavia", some of my childhood drawings, autoethnographic photograph, 2019, Ruma, Serbia

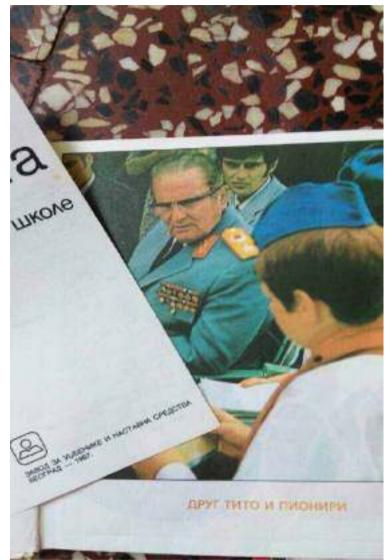




Figure 105: 1986 *Bukvar*, with the photo of Tito, autoethnographic photograph, 2020, Ruma, Serbia Figure 106: 1978 magazine *Newsweek*, "After Tito, What?", autoethnographic photograph, 2020, Ruma, Serbia

This sense of belonging was deeply integrated in the cores of our beings and the best signifier of this is 1986 "Bukvar"- the first book of every child who starts school. It is a book in which the first letters are written, the book in which 7-year-olds practice writing: two types of alphabet-Cyrillic first, in my case (territory of today's Serbia) and then Latin, at the age of 8. Among other reminders of my childhood, this book was safely stored in the attic of my family house, for me to find it in 2020. The second page shows a photo of Tito, surrounded by his pioneers and members of Yugoslav youth and the photo is named; "Tito and pioneers" This was long before we would learn that there is something called ethnic diversity, but on the other hand, my family attic hid another side of reality, obvious in the 1978 Western newspapers that my father was subscribed to. I found these among the other old books and magazines and the question they posed in 1978 was: "After Tito, What?" I guess they knew things that we were not aware of, but I am sure that my father knew too, informed by the propaganda other than that of the Yugoslav prevailing narrative. However, he kept quiet, and never spoke of it. The irony is that in 1986, I still learnt letters from a book with Tito's photograph, some 6 years after his death. That is how strong this collective spirit was in us, Yugoslavs, with the ghost of the dead president, overshadowing us and our existence.

Quoting Baric (2020) "When this sense of being uprooted becomes particularly painful to face, my parents will sometimes lean into what was a time when it seems that ethnic diversity was a source of strength, rather than a reason for fragmentation. It is easy to romanticise a state that no longer exists. This is particularly true for the former Yugoslavia, which even has its own term for the poetic languor over what was and could have been: Yugonostalgia. A pining for a state with jobs for everyone, housing provided by the state, and a multicultural embrace of brotherhood and unity (*bratstvo i jedinstvo*). Some of this nostalgia can almost feel like Cold War era propaganda, complete with children "pioneers", who wore navy blue hats and red kerchiefs around their necks while saluting the photos of their president, Josip Broz Tito".

Nowadays, I have asked myself multiple times, at various borders, watching how people are treated, watching how they are suffering, whether that is necessary. Especially, while crossing the borders with ex-Yugoslav countries by bus, this fact becomes fully evident in the ways in which we now treat each other, not even as strangers, foreigners, but far above that. I can still feel this hostility, it might be quiet, and at times implied, it might not always be there, but this issue surrounding the borders is always burning. In Yugoslavia, our passport was enough to travel. Today, there are countless rules, deferring from country to country. As we were welcomed once, we are undesirable today, one same single person affected by the changing political circumstances. Indeed, who does decide on the value of a human being? Who really decides on whether we are entitled to a sense of belonging?

According to Baric (2020) "National identity is useful for many things. From raising armies, to encouraging ideals and behaviours, and fostering that woolly but potent sense of "belonging." The process of deciding who has a right to feel that attachment, however, can be up to the whims of leaders and bureaucrats, the tragedies of history, and the arbitrary decisions of the rich and powerful. People who have never lived in or felt attached to a certain country may be citizens, while those who were born and raised in a state may not be able to claim belonging. The grey area will always test the bounds of who is welcome, with the exception sometimes demonstrating the rule. The former Yugoslavia welcoming countries can be easily taken over by xenophobia and nationalism. When that happens, it becomes apparent how fragile and arbitrary a nation's identity can be. What do national identity cards and passports say, after all? The languages we speak? The religion we ascribe to? The values we have? Maybe in some cases. But definitely not all".

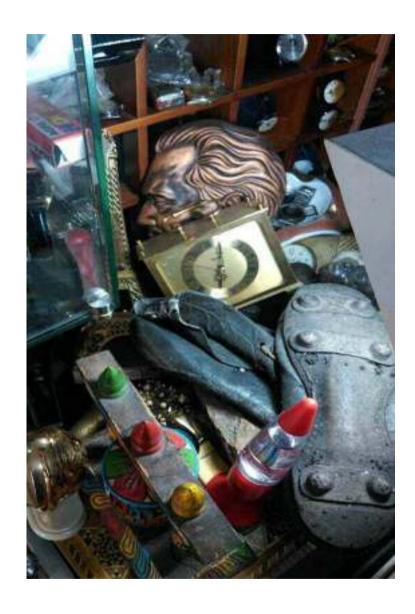


Figure 107: The relief of Tito, behind the old clock and old football boots, autoethnographic photograph, 2020, Old Market, Skoplje

My practice-based photographic research in the form of photographs and texts *Where Do I Belong? - on Belonging* was also presented as part of a Nomadic online dialogue available on the Researchcatalogue website: http://www.researchcatalogue.net/view/976547/1043644...



Figure 108. *On Belonging*, text and photography, part of a Nomadic online dialogue, Buffer Fringe Cyprus 2020, Nicosia, Available on the: http://www.researchcatalogue.net/view/976547/1043644..., (Accessed 10th October 2023)

1.5.7 Where Do I Belong? – On BELONGING

At times it feels as if I have been carrying these rainy, grey, muddy, and foggy days with me my whole life. They never really ceased to exist. This fog is different than the English one. It is sticky and it overtakes your soul. It swallows you and you swallow it. You coexist. You coexist with greyness. That is what war does to you.

Our war was specific in the sense that it was directly derived from national identity. In the spirit of belonging we were raised, and the sense of belonging and national identity was our precipice. This was the point of tearing, as if these seams, that were artificially formed by the hand of a skilled tailor, started slowly losing the strength that held the structure together. When the system started to give in, it continued tearing at an unbelievable speed. Right there the tear would spread through our beliefs, through our reinstalled national identities. All that was buried deep down, all that was hidden behind the systems of the communist belief flooded over us. People suddenly remembered that Serbia and Croatia did not fight on the same side in the Second World War. Suddenly all the bodies of our ancestors, those who had died during the Second World War came alive. My belief is that those people were never properly buried, as the communist system, in order to make us all equal, insisted on forgetting the unpleasant and undesirable elements of the past, or at least those that did not align with the communist values. Those who did not want to forget were dealt with. Many intellectuals were sent to concentration camps during Tito's rule.

1.5.8 Denial: Moments Remembered 11

In my family, we never spoke about my great grandfather. Up to that point, I knew nothing of his existence. I just knew that my granddad had struggled after the Second World War. The post war years had brought him hunger and poverty. He had struggled to be the man of the house and to provide for his mother and sister.

I remember their house in Sremska Mitrovica, today Serbia, back then Croatia. I remember it vaguely and I remember his mother through a thick yellow fog of memories. I was 6 when I last saw her. I remember my granddad's sister. 'She was a nurse', my granddad would say. She was beautiful too. I remember Becej, the institution for alcohol addiction. She was happy to see us. I asked by grand mum why aunt Evica was so fat. My grand mum said that she was swollen because of pills. My grand mum was ashamed. She always cared about other people's opinion.



Figure 109: Black as a Choice- the Colour of Sorrow, my great-grandmother, Mariska Puskas, on the right my grandad's sister, Evica Puskas, on the left, Sremska Mitrovica, Yugoslavia, photograph from my family's personal collection, 2020, Ruma, Serbia (image quality affected by age)

Evica never came home. She died in an institution for alcohol addiction.

Today I believe that denial killed her. These two war orphans, my granddad and her, were not entitled even to a memory of their father. My grandfather chose communism, and he was an appreciated member of the communist society. He followed the ideal and strongly believed in it. He was respected. That important word, respect, liberated us from all the past faults. In a way communism saved my grandfather. I remember him saying that he hated Croatians because they killed his dad. Communism insisted on forgetting the past, and by forcing oblivion, it insisted on the absence of the old national identity or better said, a creation of a new national identity, and this fact gave my granddad the opportunity for the resolution of past ancestral sins. He could finally settle the bill. Therefore, he chose communism.

His sister chose to die. She made this choice in the same way as my father did in the years that followed.

Then came 1991. Fear was in the air, fear, and madness. Through the rising tide of nationalism, I learnt about my great grandfather and that well-hidden secret became known to me. Suddenly, there was this need to keep documents related to him hidden in the attic. My father was so scared that they would find them. The situation was tense. It was hard to breathe. Some new craziness and hatred entered people's lives. There was this sudden insistence on the display of national identity, a different one from the one we were thought to embrace. This one was vile, dangerous, ready for bloodshed. I could not understand why. I was just sick of listening about it. I did not know who the uniformed man in the photo in our attic was. Back then, I learnt that we do not bear his family name Verona. The memory of him reduced to that small photograph. My grandfather never mentioned him. Even today I feel unease saying that he was killed fighting on the German side in the war. Regardless of that, it was logical that my great grandfather fought in the regular German army. During my childhood, the fact that the part of Serbia I lived in (Vojvodina, and my hometown Ruma) was occupied by Germany in the Second World War and belonged to the Independent State of Croatia, was also kept as a public secret. I managed to retrieve photographs from this period, simply because some of the German people who had been forced to leave my town after the Second World War, and those who had managed to survive, returned to Ruma after the war to write the history of their people who had once inhabited this place.



Figure 110: Franz W.,1990. Service sign, Rumaer Dokumentation 1745- 1945 Mittelpunkt der deutschen Bewegungin Syrmien, Slavonien and Kroatien, Band 1, Herausgegeben von der Donauschwäbischen, Kulturstiftung Stuttgart, p.159 (photograph)

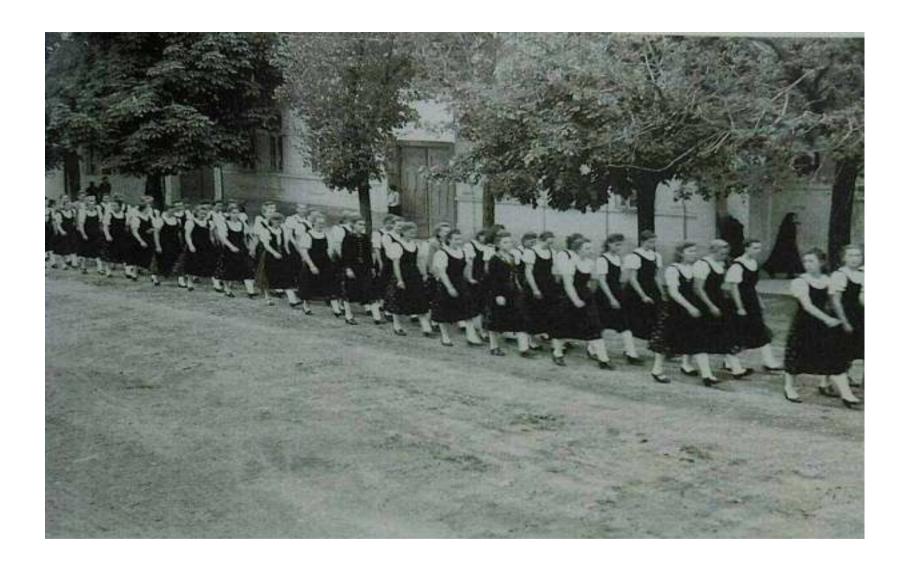


Figure 111: Franz W.,1990. Einheitstracht der Mädchen, (Girls' Uniform) 20. 4. 1941, Rumaer Dokumentation 1745- 1945 Mittelpunkt der deutschen Bewegungin Syrmien, Slavonien and Kroatien, Band 1, Herausgegeben von der Donauschwäbischen, Kulturstiftung Stuttgart, p.159 (photograph)



Figure 112: Franz W.,1990. *Jugendführer Brumm, Meldung an Ortsleiter Fürst, dahinter Major Strecker, Bürgermeister Serwatzy,* (Youth leader Brumm, reports to local manager Furst, behind him mayor Strecker, mayor Serwatzy) 20. 4. 1942 Rumaer Dokumentation 1745- 1945 Mittelpunkt der deutschen Bewegungin Syrmien, Slavonien and Kroatien, Band 1, Herausgegeben von der Donauschwäbischen, Kulturstiftung Stuttgart, p.163 (photograph)



Figure 113: Franz W.,1990. *Lehrkräfte und Schülerinnen, (Teachers and Students),* 20. 4. 1941 Rumaer Dokumentation 1745- 1945 Mittelpunkt der deutschen Bewegungin Syrmien, Slavonien and Kroatien, Band 1, Herausgegeben von der Donauschwäbischen, Kulturstiftung Stuttgart, p.160 (photograph)



Figure 114: Franz W.,1990. Begrüßung durch Jugendführer Brumm, (Welcome by Youth Leader Brumm) 20. 4. 1942 (Foto Ewald Serwatzy), Rumaer Dokumentation 1745- 1945 Mittelpunkt der deutschen Bewegungin Syrmien, Slavonien and Kroatien, Band 1, Herausgegeben von der Donauschwäbischen, Kulturstiftung Stuttgart, p.164 (photograph)

My great-grandfather had ended up in a mass grave in Našice, Croatia. My grandfather never went there. He was not sure where they had buried him. His father does not have a tombstone. Today, I do not know where to look, who to ask. There is no-one left alive to tell me. My grandfather used to say that his father was mobilised one day and taken to war instead of a rich man's son. He was taken away from his wife and two small children. He was not a soldier, but just an ordinary man who was killed for nothing. Does the side on which he fought in war determine the value of the memory of his existence? What factors determine how you are remembered? Not even his family name remained. His widow needed to survive and take care of her two children. No one knocked on her door when she was left alone with them. No one knocked at her door then, but they did when they mobilised and took her husband to his death.

I read an article about what Ustase, an ultranationalist movement in Croatia, that collaborated with Nazi Germany in the Second World War (Stockton 2019) did to a Serbian village during the war. I feel that I would be hated today for who he was. If only they knew. These articles showed up after the rise of nationalism, on both sides in the conflict. Now I wonder what the purpose was. One might feel hatred and disgust after reading about such ferocious acts. They were written in an accusatory manner to provoke hatred. And then on the other hand, there is my great- grandfather. But all I know is that he was just a man taken from the safety of his home never to see his family again. When I read the comments below these articles that praise the heroic past and heroic suffering of a nation, regardless of the side, I feel so helpless. It is impossible to bear the level of hatred. My greatgrandfather died for nothing back then. I do not care on which side. I wish I had his surname. His widow decided to renounce it because it was not safe, so she took her maiden name after his death. This deleted the last trace of him. He only remained as a faint memory in my grandfather's mind. Who was he important to then, after he was killed? The depth of all the senselessness of his calvary cannot be explained by words.



Figure 115: My family house attic and a box which hid my great-grandfather's existence, autoethnographic photographs, 2019, Ruma, Serbia

I respect all the people who died in combat, but I do not believe in the justification of reasons. I cannot relate to it. In my blood runs the ancestral burden of fault, disgrace, and denial. This man was not worth of mention because he died on the Nazi side in war, or to be more precise in Domobrani- a Croatian regular army. I might be wrong, but I never see him as someone who fought willingly in that war. I only see him as someone who got killed for nothing. Judging is so easy, but we were not the ones who took that bullet. If we could only learn from the past mistakes.

And I am sick of nationalism. I am sick of our side and their side. I blame national identity for it. It is better to have no identity, than war and hatred identity. I do not approve of this selective memory as well. To me, after the rise of nationalism, preceding the Yugoslav war, it seemed as if the new message was that we should remember our heroic past, so that we could kill again in its name. Even though, I do believe that we should remember it, I believe that we should also learn how to forgive. Especially we should never judge or make decisions based on half-truths.

My grandfather spent his whole life rebuilding the country, building Yugoslavia. He worked all his life and dedicated everything to this country which someone calls a "construct" today. He worked hard to redeem his ancestral sin. He worked hard to build this ideal. His generation spent their lives building and repairing. They believed in peace and brotherhood and unity. For them, Yugoslavia was not a construct. It was their reality. It was my reality too, in which my cousins lived next door. It was my reality, in which my neighbours did not look at us with hatred. These people of Yugoslavia dedicated their lives, only to live long enough to see the disaster with their own eyes. Long enough only to see everything they worked for, everything they believed in, everything they used to live and breathe for, disappear.



Figure 116: Verona, the lost family name, photograph from my family's personal collection, (my great grandfather, on the left) 2020, Ruma, Serbia

1.6 HUNGER AND INFLATION AS PATHS TOWARDS THE REVOLUTION

In my experience, hunger was always present in a way, and it feels as if it never really vanished. Even during the Yugoslav period, it was still there, although not obvious and not the reality of most people, but it was implied and hidden, as if it was waiting for the right time to emerge. Perhaps I see hunger from this perspective, simply because of bearing witness to the crises that happened after the dissolution of Yugoslavia. However, I still do remember how in that short period of my life in Yugoslavia, until my 10th birthday, I did not feel deprived. My father would buy me high quality Yugoslav produced toys, as we had our own well-developed industry. My grandad used to say that we possess a capital in toys. From my perspective today, this feels like a delusion overthrown by the nightmare days that followed.

1.6.1 Celebrations: Moments Remembered 12

Around my 10th birthday, my father told me that I was to be baptised. I do not have any memories of feelings regarding that. I just thought how funny that all seemed to me, this need for it to be done in secret, and that I was especially not allowed to tell this to my mum as she is Serbian. Therefore, I was baptised secretly in 1990, in Belgrade, Serbia, in a very strict Catholic order of Jesuits. Around the same time my aunt's sons, my closest cousins, were baptised in their church, an Orthodox one. This was a public ceremony in my hometown, and I remember them making fun about it, jokingly spitting at us, their family members standing behind them, as a part of the ritual. Of course, we were children, and we did not take baptisms seriously, as we were not raised in a religious manner, as that was not desirable in communism. Regardless of this, today I understand that those were the roots of our further disputes and disagreements. Simply, the upcoming war that threatened to divide us, caused the tear between family members, the division between Catholics and Orthodox. I do not remember when my mum found out about me being baptised, nor that she even cared, as she is not religious to this day. Even though she comes from an Orthodox family, never did she, like her sister celebrate any religious holiday, and she remained faithful to communism. She did not change like most people around us did, like the wind. Suddenly, this resurrected religious belonging and the persistent insistence on belonging based on our nationalities, prompted the revival of old religious holidays and celebrations. As children and as Yugoslavs, we had one major celebration and that was New Year. Everything else was celebrated, but without too much accent on whether it was Catholic, Orthodox or Muslim. The religious holidays were not forgotten but were also not that important and we all celebrated everything and that was nice, always having a cause for celebration. However, that new insistence on religious distinction was just a prelude to



Figure 117: New Year, photographs from my family's personal collection, 2020, Ruma, Serbia (image quality affected by age)



Figure 118: New Year, photographs from my family's personal collection, 2020, Ruma, Serbia (image quality affected by age)

I remember how many people around me, such as my aunt's family, my neighbours and friends, suddenly started celebrating Serbian Slava which glorifies family saints. It is an old tradition although it was not celebrated by most people during communism. With the reestablishment of the nationalist premises, preceding the Yugoslav War, it regained its importance, thus becoming the most famous Serbian family tradition. An average Serbian family prepares a feast, and the celebration sometimes lasts for two or more days. In those days of war, it was hard for some families to recover financially. Regardless of this, celebrating Slava established their national identity and kept their good name, or in Serbian words, kept their good cheek (zadržati obraz), with cheek here referring to honour. If someone is a good host (domaćin), his guests would spread the word. Slava was not a Catholic tradition and we never celebrated it. My mom who was Orthodox, was never religious. She was and still is a communist. Personally, I believe that she is an optimist, who chose to believe in good, in all those beautiful and humane promises of communism. Therefore, I grew up in a merger of clashes. My father became paranoid and frightened by those new values. As a Croatian he was hated, and the hatred went both ways. I remember fires burning in the street during the Orthodox Christmas, which is in January. I remember drunk people riding horses in the streets, I remember the exploding sound of firecrackers. In my mind it resembled the sound of bullets and I remember being afraid. I felt the hatred rising and I was not sure what to expect. I just knew that they knew I was different. I remember being scared as I suddenly could not fit in, and I felt chills down my spine. Simply put, I did not belong.

Celebrations were always followed by an abundance of food, and I see the roots of this in hunger too. I have always disliked celebrations and have always felt unease when they would approach. Those were the times when my father was particularly edgy and there were rare holidays that brought peace. I remember food and a lot of alcohol. Celebrations were days when he probably re-questioned his own life, and the absence of his own belonging. To me, celebrations brought the mixture of childhood joy and subsequent horror. As the peak of all the irony, my father died in 2013 on Christmas Day.

In my perspective, hunger was always present. My grandmother would tell me about the Second World War, and how she was hungry. My grandparents, aside from working in a factory, dedicated their lives to producing food and they never stopped working. They were the true communists, and they would rarely rest. They knew what sacrifice was and my grandma would often recall that they could not afford meat while my father was a student. They grew vegetables on the little piece of land they had, far from the town. They could not afford meat, but my father would come home for a visit from his studies in Bosnia in a new coat. Funny though, this fact that they could not always afford meat, for the area where I live is called "Svinjski Srem" -The Pig Srem, because of frequent pig slaughtering.



Figure 119: Franz W.,1990. Mastschwein mit 445 kg (Fattening pig to 445 kg), Rumaer Dokumentation 1745- 1945 Mittelpunkt der deutschen Bewegungin Syrmien, Slavonien and Kroatien, Band 1, Herausgegeben von der Donauschwäbischen, Kulturstiftung Stuttgart, p.19 (photograph)

And then there was my student canteen. I would eagerly enter, as being a student back then, in 1999, in a country devastated by bombing, meant being constantly hungry, but sadly there were always only two options, beans without meat (klot pasulj) in Serbian, which means beans without anything else, or some funny mixture of vegetables, which the university canteen cooks would put in the same pot, and then serve that so-called meal to us starving students. Today I find myself wondering how my parents managed to send me to university. My mum had to move out of her apartment and go back to live with her parents, only to be able to pay for my studies by renting out her home. There was very little left for anything else. As a student, I could never afford snacks or juice, but I remember how some other students were well off in the period of war. I remember one girl coming to the university in her own car, drinking that small cardboard juice box whenever she wanted. Deprivation is a horrible thing. It makes you lose your dignity. It makes you eager. It makes you feel less worthy. It kills your self-confidence. You are not even capable of being jealous because you become a shell, empty inside. My constant worry about how my parents would manage was bordering on obsession.

This hunger pathology in my family went deeper as years went by. My grandmother would cook and there were always disputes as she would tell my father, "Eat, so that we can". That meant, eat so that her and my grandad could have what remained. That is the hunger mentality. It made my father furious. Fortunately, we were ready to deal with hunger, as the crises which followed brought total misery.

1.6.2 1990: Moments Remembered 12

I remember the nineties when the inflation struck. The citizens of Serbia were millionaires, and not only millionaires. They were billionaires, the poorest billionaires in the world at the time. Back then a 500 000 000 000-dinar banknote was issued, and it was only enough to buy bread, one loaf of bread, if we were lucky enough to get to the store on time, because by the time we got to the store, the currency would devalue again (Nisavic 2018). There was no milk, no sugar, just the emptiness of store shelves. As a ten-year-old, I dreamt of chocolate and bananas. The only sweet thing my family could afford, in rare cases when we managed to get a hold of sugar, was strawberry jam. We were lucky enough to grow strawberries in the garden behind our house. I do not remember complaining. Today I am aware that this jam was made with the one ingredient money cannot buy.

I also remember Christmas. I was still just a child and I remember dreaming of toys, which before the war, I had an abundance of. Then Christmas day came, and all I got was a sparkling pen from my aunt. I remember feeling piercing disappointment, but now I know that she could not afford more. Today, I keep the memory of her through the flower she gave me in the years that followed.

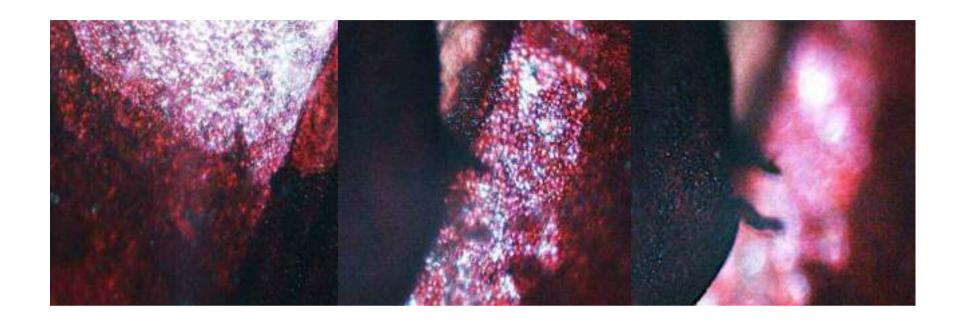


Figure 120: Flower Petal, microscope photographs, magnification X1000, 2021, Ruma, Serbia

I remember those dark times and rainy days. Sometimes it rains in a different way, and it is peaceful and solemn, the rain that purifies. But those days were simply gloomy. That rain had nothing in common with the simple pleasures of childhood when one rejoices just by seeing the merry dance of raindrops on the concrete, and the surrounding nature breathes together with the soaking soil. That rain could not wash off the dark days. It did not bring any good, but gloomier and gloomier news from the war zone. Yes. They did really wage war during the weekends, in Croatia, close to the border with Serbia, just an hour away from my hometown Ruma, Serbia. As if they were in an action movie; kill, rape, and plunge, only to come home on Monday. I did not know about it as I was only 11, however it was there, in the air and we all sensed it. The dark days of my childhood. The days in which we were to forget that we should be equal. The days in which brotherhood and equality were condemned by men who wanted to play war. The days in which we were so poor and some of them suddenly so rich. Those days were heavy, with lead skies that did not promise anything good. At the edge of my childhood there it was, the foresight of horror.

The irony of it all is that the actual bloody war did not really happen to us, we did not get killed but parts of us died. Then, at the edge of my childhood were the worried faces of my parents trying to make some sense in madness. The sudden poverty was followed by the immediate, subsequent need to show off some non-existent wealth. The dark days brought new values, new fashion on display- designer shoes and tracksuits, such as Nike, which was the most popular brand. Back then the people around me would put on tracksuit jackets and trousers, accessorised with a gold chain. And we were hungry. My parents would save money for six months to buy me those Nike sneakers and still could not. I remember we bought Reebok as they were cheaper. This sounds so ridiculous today, when we know how disposable they are, but we, the post-communist kids dreamt of them. We washed our sneakers with toothbrushes to preserve them as long as possible. That fashion brought a new dark lifestyle to a country previously known for its culture. Yugoslavia had rock music, superb writers, movies, and actors and suddenly, there was the crisis of values inevitably following the monetary crises. New folk singers emerged, half naked women or men in designer sneakers on TV served as a distraction from the horrors of the impoverished lives of the people of Serbia and from the war zone news. All the media showed us back then was designed to look like a dream and sometimes I wonder was it just a dream because no-one would believe it was reality. It was one of the bad dreams I hoped to forget but have not managed, even to this day.



Figure 121: The Memory of crisis, Ruma during the 1990s, photograph taken from the archive collection of The County Museum in Ruma, Serbia

The nightmare of empty shelves in the supermarkets with prominent folk singers grinning at us from the TV screen, the wedding of singer Ceca, the so-called "Serbian mother" and Arkan, the war criminal who subsequently got assassinated. The pride and glory, all that bloody money and the images of people fighting for bread in the streets of Belgrade, Serbia (Paunovic 2015), remained engraved in my mind forever.

That crisis was different from the corona crisis which the world experienced in 2019. It was not that we did not have toilet paper, like in 2019 when people were fighting at supermarkets over toilet paper. We had nothing, literally nothing, totally empty shelves. My parents would get their salary, one Deutsche mark, the equivalent of what they earned in dinar. The Serbian dinar was so unstable that unless they turned it into Deutsche mark it would lose value instantly. By the time they would reach the open market where dealers were waiting, they would already lose their salary. One Deutsche mark, a teacher's monthly salary. How do you afford your child's designer shoes when they were not a necessity, but they determined whether your child would be accepted by other kids or rejected?

Back then on TV we watched Seselj, a politician who was later liberated due to the lack of evidence after 15 years of trail at the Hague for war crimes, comment on how, back then, they were killing Croatians with a rusty spoon. On one of those entertainment shows with guest star singers he talked openly about it and the people in the studio laughed. I remember Ceca's smile even today. There was no one who could stop that madness. Words cannot describe it. Only oblivion brings resolution.

With financial loss came loss of respect and dignity and the overall crises, not only of cultural values, but values in general. When people were deprived of their basic needs and most of them could not focus on anything other than on survival, we became true examples of Maslow's hierarchy. With the loss of the ability to fulfil basic needs, one might easily lose unity within oneself, and the loss of beliefs follows the loss of identity. My family and the people around me went through the complete re-questioning of their own existence.

Finally, the gloom of our reality culminated with The 5th of October Revolution- The overthrow of Slobodan Milosevic by the liberal people's movement *Otpor* (Resistance).

While talking about Milosevic, the president of Serbia at a time, Daalder and O'hanlon (2000) state "to prevent a serial killer from doing damage in his own back yard".

Reading the book *Winning Ugly, NATO's War to Save Kosovo* by Daalder and O'hanlon, left me with the feeling of nausea because I started thinking about our lives under the rule of the above-mentioned serial killer, Slobodan Milosevic. This book does not deal with the ordinary people or, as they called themselves back then "The Whistle-blowers". In this book it is stated that the NATO bombing led to Slobodan Milosevic being overthrown, and that is the book's official stance and its prevailing tone. It does not mention civilians much, as it simply deals only with the NATO military strategy, although it does mention some of the strategic mistakes, such as the bombing of the Chinese embassy in Belgrade, which led to developing tensions between the NATO countries, China, and Russia, as they did not agree with the NATO bombing of Serbia. Even though the book mentions NATO bombing civilians by mistake, regardless of that, it does not deal with the lives of these civilians, lives under sanctions imposed on all who survived. It does not mention my parents who worked for that one-euro monthly salary as teachers. It does not mention their efforts for survival.

A year after the NATO bombing of Serbia, Milosevic decided to organise the presidential and parliamentary elections in which he eventually lost but refused to accept his defeat. This led the opposition to gather and organise against his rule, and in the fore front of the upcoming protests was the student movement *Otpor* (Resistance) which previously organised student and civil protests in 1996 and 1997 and this student organisation slowly developed into the liberal people's movement. Their efforts were supported by the independent media, parts of Serbian universities and the society elite. These efforts soon turned into a mass social resistance to the ruling regime, growing repression and the overall destructive processes in the

Serbian society. The most important outcome of the revolution was that it put an end to the military politics and the domineering logic of war. At that point the new prospect of prosperity and hope emerged, as the people finally started thinking about the future and not only survival (Vujadinovic, 2001, p. 338). Aside from this, the revolution pointed out to the fact that the Serbian society was far from a civil society as, according to Vujadinovic (2001, p.339), "it failed to promote an atmosphere of political cultural tolerance, non-violence and respect towards autonomy and differences, or to be more precise, non-segregation towards the other races and nations". Quoting Vujadinovic (2001, p.340) "ethnonationalism, nationalism as political pathology and hate and war speech" took place instead. Beyond this, during those years my family, my neighbours, and the people around me experienced the reintroduction of nationalistic values. Suddenly, we were surrounded by an overall insistence on national identity of the prevailing Serbian nation, regardless of cultural differences of many minorities. According to Vujadinovic (2001, p.340) this was evident in "nourishment of Serbian tradition and religion- the orthodox one while introducing the religious education to schools, celebrating Orthodox Christmas and New Year, and using Cyrillic officially, according to the 1992 Constitution (although Latin alphabet had an equal status according to the previous Constitution)".

I remember all this too well and I remember being told "Your dad is Croatian" as if this was the worst thing to be. I also remember those days as days of general unease and turmoil followed by the division within the society to those for and against the rule of Milosevic. The constant indoctrination of the nation, media misuse and control are what stayed stuck in my mind. Most of the older and middle-aged people blindly believed in Milosevic's words and I remember how I watched them on TV during a political rally in which they kept shouting "Slobo, we love you" while he just stood there proud, looking at them, to finally say "I love you too". For me this was the ultimate betrayal of one's own nation, but regardless of that, many people blindly followed and never questioned him. I would get into frequent disputes with my mother's dad who defended Milosevic until the very end. I could not believe that those people who supported him could not see the bleakness of our reality.

Today I can say that I am proud of my parents for marching against this government. I am proud to say that my parents were the "Whistle-blowers." Above all I am proud to say that my parents never changed their beliefs after Yugoslavia was gone. They did not become nationalist oriented, nor did they start nourishing any of the new values. My mum, even though she is Serbian, never celebrated Orthodox holidays and she kept her communist belief unlike many people around us. The 5th of October Revolution ended with the mob forceful entering the Serbian parliament and destroying the interior of the building. Regardless of what is stated in the book "Winning Ugly, NATO's War to Save Kosovo" by Daalder and O'hanlon, I know that reality was different and that we, the ordinary people of Serbia, young people, students, and our parents, brought an end to the mass murderer's rule, the rule that impoverished us and brought devastation to our well-being.

1.7 DEATH

1.7.1 What About the Empty Space? Moments Remembered 14

I precisely remember the moment I got sick.

It was a bright day, one of those sunny warm days we have in Serbia. I went to my family house, the house I grew up in, to visit my father. I was trying to make things right in more sense than one, while finding my way through the rubbish that started piling up inside the house, through the stench, the cats' faeces, through empty and full, dirty dishes which laid all over the floor and all over the tables and cupboards. Cats would walk everywhere. Defrosted meat forgotten on the table, in the microwave, left to rotten. Worms and stench of death were present everywhere. I would collect the rotten meat and worms with a shovel while trying to prevent myself from vomiting.

On the day I got sick, I was standing, under the plum tree in our backyard. The plums were ripe and ready to be made into rakija (strong alcoholic drink) for my dad. He would buy it anyhow. The years of war and horrors took a toll on him. Even though I was 30 years old, he still came out of the house screaming at me. I can clearly recall something clicking in my head. I felt like I sucked in all the surroundings, the sunshine, the plums and the sound and volume of my father's voice. It all merged and entered the core of my being. I felt as if I got caught up by a whirl which sucked me in. Today, I am still struggling with anxiety and lifelong medication for thyroid.

The next thing I remember was a cold, frosty December morning. My father's clothes washed, waiting to get dry so I could take them to the hospital. It was one of those thick, foggy Serbian winter days when the cold enters your bones. Cold and fear. I sometimes wonder what it was like in the warzone, in the frontline on a cold day like that one. Who had the willingness to kill?

To get to the hospital, I would drive through this beige cold atmosphere, through the frost and snow alone, only to gaze through the hospital window, while my father was drifting between life and death. All I could do, was stare through that window while he was lying unconscious in bed.

We were alone for too long after our relatives migrated to Croatia during the war. My father would tell me: 'I am going to die'

I never believed him. Yet, there we were. While staring at a distance through the window, I kept thinking about all that loss. It slowly started coming back to me as I realised, I would lose my father, too. One after another, my family members perished. They slowly disappeared, the people who once were Yugoslavia. Loss, loss, loss, loss. You do not recuperate from the previous one and the next is already there, knocking at your door, lurking, and waiting.

There were no doctors, no friends, no husbands, and no family members, only my dying father and me in an empty hospital room. We had reached that point of facing death together. After all the struggle, tears, pain, misery, all our mutual travels, lost hopes, and our attempts to love each other. Then and there I faced death, the ultimate loss for those who remain.

He died on Christmas Eve, 24th December.

Five weeks earlier, I rang the bell outside our house one morning but there was no answer. I knew it immediately. The fear overwhelmed me. I jumped over the gate which was locked from the inside. I found my father on the floor. The house was cold, and the heating was off. There was only the smell of rakija in the air. He could still talk, but he could not move his neck. Internal brain haemorrhage as a consequence of the fall.

At first, his condition stabilised. Unfortunately, he was transferred to a hospital in a town his father was from, Sremska Mitrovica. People say that patients are sent there to die. They strapped him to the bed there. Apparently, he kicked the nurse in the stomach. His roommate said that they did

not really feed him. They would just leave the food next to his bed. He also said that that morning they carried away a man who died. I feared that my father was hungry. They only allowed me to see him twice a week.

If I only knew. If only they had told me that I was expected to pay a bribe for him to be treated properly. One day his doctor welcomed me to his office. It was a small, stuffy office without windows. He did not talk, and I did not understand. I only asked whether my dad would survive. He only answered: 'He might.' I spent years eating myself out and thinking about whether he would live today if only I had paid.

Today, corruption is legalised in my country. Every doctor can take an amount ranging from 50-450 euros from a patient to the misery of the impoverished people of Serbia and to the disgrace of the doctors who are not paid properly.

The day when he died was one of those thick, foggy, frosty days in which I learnt that socialising with death broadens one's perspective on life and re-examines the true importance of things.

The brutality and the naked truth of this fact came to full light once my grandmother got sick and there was no one to take care of her except me. This woman, who had been working all her life, who knew nothing but work and who was saving the little money she earned as a typical Yugoslav factory worker, was now facing the end of her life without even knowing who she once was. Due to severe dementia, she could not remember anything, and she did not remember any savings. What irony life sometimes prepares for us?! In those days, I learnt how futile all our efforts are in the eyes of death. How manic we are while chasing money, recognition, possessions, safety, only to realise how senseless the chase is. Moreover, for me, this new perspective was an epiphany which brought revelation.

The moment I took her bedsheets to pack them so I can move her to my house, resembled a movie scene. When I flapped her bedsheet, dinar notes started flying everywhere. They flew up and around and soon took over the space. When I looked more closely, I realised that they were from the period of Yugoslavia, long after Yugoslavia ceased to exist. At that point, they were only worthless and meaningless pieces of paper. They had lost their value, discredited together with Yugoslavia. At the end of her life, everything she believed in, the system of values, the effort, public recognition, and her husband's prominent position within the communist party lost its meaning. Everywhere around laid that money, the monetary symbol that marked one era, lost, and forgotten.

Soon the time came to dress her up when she died. I knew I must be quick or otherwise the body stiffens. I remember the anecdote with her eyes. They kept opening. I would close them, but they would continue opening. When there was no-one else I could ask how to close a dead person's eyes and I needed to be quick or it would be too late, and they would stay open, I remembered a scene from a famous Serbian film director Emir Kusturica's movie *Time of the Gypsies* (Dom za vešanje) and I put two coins on her eye lids to keep them shut. In the movie the Roma boy steals these coins from his father's eye lids.

When they died, only material things remained behind. These mute, silent and meaningless possessions outlived my family members, who died together with Yugoslavia. Dead, quiet things which once served alive people, were the only reminders of our mutual life. They were now lurking out of every corner, those purposeless things evoking memories. I constantly had the feeling that my father would show up, simply emerge from any corner. That is how much he was a part of that house. For me, being disillusioned by the epiphany of the false sense of security was a liberating experience. In the era of the migrant crises in 2019, this was experienced on large scales and the loss would arrive in the matter of seconds. Material things chain us to themselves and give our lives a purpose. Even though they are essential to our survival, to me it seems as if they at times represent an ominous and mischievous threat, and they are reminders of how we are never fully ready to face loss.



Figure 122: What About the Empty Space? autoethnographic photographs, 2019, my family house, Ruma, Serbia

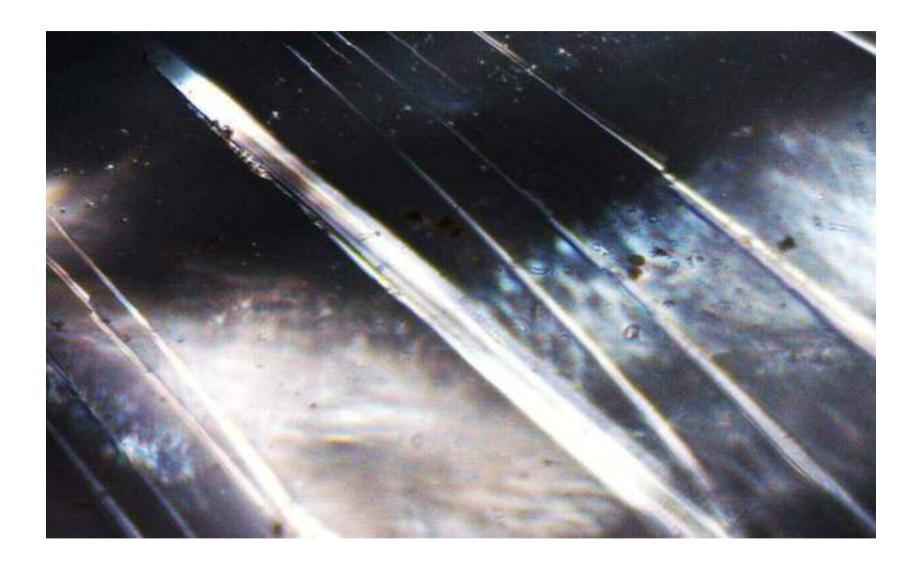


Figure 123: Broken Glass, microscope photograph, magnification X1000, samples taken from my family house, 2021, Ruma, Serbia



Figure 124: Broken Glass, microscope photograph, magnification X1000, samples taken from my family house, 2021, Ruma, Serbia

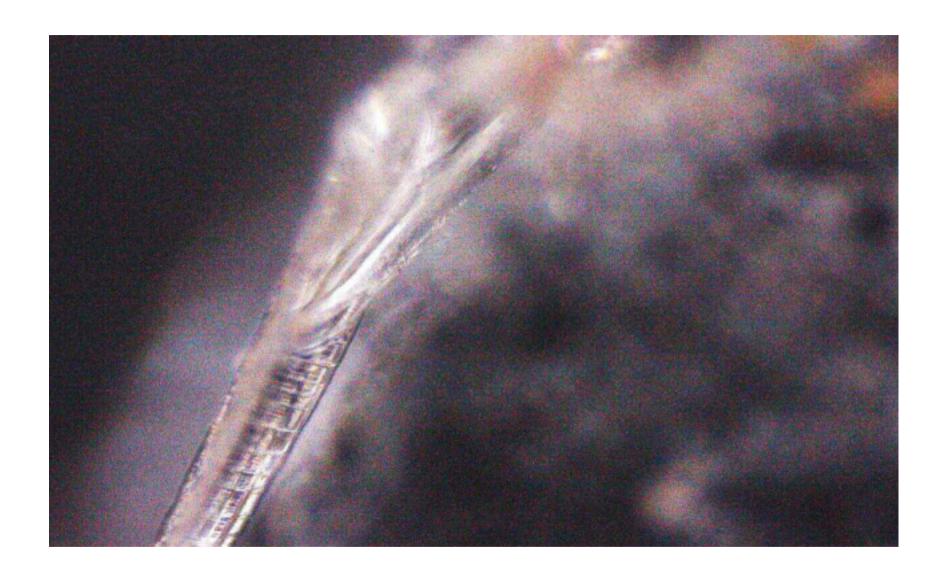


Figure 125: Broken Glass, microscope photograph, magnification X1000, samples taken from my family house, 2021, Ruma, Serbia

1.7.2 Bombing of Serbia 1999: Moments Remembered 15

I remember the bombing. I was 19. All the bridges that connected Serbia and the northern province of Vojvodina were already destroyed. There was fire and smoke everywhere. Novi Sad, the capital of Vojvodina was covered in flames. Focusing on trying to survive did not allow the fact of my beautiful country burning down to become my priority. I cannot explain how it felt, as if I was turning grey from the inside, as if someone took all the colours away, as if all the sense disappeared. We, the ordinary people, could not face it. The psychological strain, the burden was too much. And it was grey, grey, everything grey. When I look back to those days, they simply have no colour. Even today, to me they feel like someone had stripped them of every meaning.

I remembered traveling through flames. Life continued through flames. The journey which would usually last less than an hour through the bridges in Novi Sad, took around three. One look at the map of Serbia would be enough to realise the absence of sense in it. Without bridges, to get to Vojvodina, I had to take the long way through Belgrade. I remember looking at my country burn through the windowpane. I was aware that a bomb could hit that bus in any second of the trip. I was aware of all the senselessness of my friends and family hiding in shelters. That bomb could hit any of their houses any second of my trip. But human beings are miraculous in their willingness to prevail against all odds. I travelled through flames and became resilient. I sometimes think that this is how I travel through life, in smoke, always through smoke and I think that this is how we, me and my family and friends survived. We became resilient, resilient to sorrow and pain, to hunger, to humiliation, to misery. We became rough and we endured. In those days I lost fear. In those days I understood the frailty of my own existence. And I prevailed, through flames and smoke.

The other way for me to get to my university in Novi Sad, Serbia, with the bridges bombed down, was to cross the river Danube on a raft. The raft would take about 50 people at a time. The others had to wait. Cold, foggy days and miserable faces were around me. Those faces told the whole truth. The eyes of those people were staring into the dirty Danube, as grey as our reality. Smoke, fog, grey and brown waves were increasing the atmosphere of sorrow, sorrow which was in the outside world and in the hearts of the people around me. People in a silent monologue were thinking about what the future would bring. That mile of water which divided one coast from the other was a memorial place to all my hopes, thoughts, prayers, and despairs. To manage to retain hope on that raft was close to a miracle with the surrounding city swallowed in flames and the thick smoke rising from the bombed sites. Standing there on that raft and not giving up was one of the hardest challenges in my life.

From the raft, I remember seeing the factories burn in the distance. The effort of so many communist workers was disappearing, the communist dream was disappearing. Their hopes and beliefs were disappearing in flames as thick black smoke was elevating towards the sky. The long stretch of years that marked one generation and the work and efforts they endured to build Yugoslavia, simply vanished. It ceased to matter. Everything they dreamt about, everything they believed in, their life work ruined so ruthlessly. The most heart- breaking thing, aside from the personal loss, was to witness the total destruction of my own country and to have the feeling that I would never be able to belong anywhere, that there would be no place under the sun for me. The worst kind of helplessness was to watch everything disappear in flames and not be able to do anything, to have my existence still forced on me and to stumble through the upcoming uncertainty of the future. The once so beautiful bridges that connected my town to Novi Sad, the second biggest city in Serbia, were bombed in a day. I was 19 and half of me was dead. I would stand on that raft while we were slowly sliding through the Danube towards the university. The building was in the vicinity of the river, hidden by the forest and the road to it led through the thick trees. To me, the forest had a nightmare effect, and it was the first thing to experience after leaving the raft. While walking past the leafless trees, I could relate with the fog. It was thick, non- transparent, as thick as the uncertainty which the future might bring. Grey, grey, pale, and everything dead- dead leaves, still, dead air and dead hope for prosperity. I could feel the fog entering my body and overwhelming me. In one of those days, I felt as if I swallowed that fog which coloured my body from the inside forever. I have learnt to coexist with it and up to this day, it occupies the same space in my mind.



Figure 126: 78 days, Ruma, 1999, a bombed down site, taken from the archive collection of The County Museum in Ruma, Serbia

Years later, one of my colleagues told me how she experienced being on the raft. She had just graduated and got her degree. On her way back home, she was standing on that same raft, squeezing her diploma firmly in her arms as the rain was falling on the raft, the people and the dirty Danube water. There was no shelter and the rain kept falling on her degree. Rain kept falling, washing away her hope for a better future.

In sturdy financial crises and with the little funds my parents could collect to send me to university, I prevailed even though I knew that I was studying to become a teacher, just like my parents who could not afford to buy a loaf of bread for that salary. In despair, I would ask my mum whether there was any point in finishing university if I was going to work for a monthly salary in the amount of today's one euro. My mum was always optimistic, and she would comfort me by saying that those bad times would eventually end and that it had to be better one day. She knew that the only thing to keep me from giving up in those dreadful circumstances was hope.

All the borders were closed, and the country totally blocked. Due to the sanctions imposed on Serbia, we needed a visa even to travel to the neighbouring countries. In my old passport, I still have a Hungarian visa, even though Hungary is just two hours away from my home. The irony of it all is that my grandmother was Hungarian, and my maiden name is Puskas, same as the surname a famous Hungarian football player. I remember that I only managed to get the visa for a trip organised by the Catholic Church in my town. It simply did not matter whether a person was Serbian, Croatian, or Hungarian, and I would not like to have been treated differently. Being a minority made no difference; we still could not leave the country. Life went on, in isolation.

As a student, I would not stay at the university town, but would travel home every weekend. That at least gave me a certain sense of security and a cooked meal. I would hitchhike which allowed me to save some money so that I could go out for a drink with my friends. I did not pay for the bus. That was how ex-Yugoslav young people fought their way through the needs of their own youth. We were lucky enough if we could afford that one drink, only so that we did not sit at an empty table. Our lives back then did continue, against all odds, against the inflation, bombing, war, and hunger. Regardless of that, we knew how deprived we were, locked and isolated in our own country. We had no Americanos, cappuccinos, or lattes with an extra shot of espresso or a choice of vanilla, caramel, or hazelnut syrup to add to our coffee, as the students in the UK have today. There were no hot pastries or cakes. We had no hot chocolate with cream and marshmallows. We did not have an opportunity to complain that our coffee was not hot enough. We were happy when we were not hungry. We could not travel, afford skiing, trips to the seaside, phones, computers, or expensive games. We could not afford clothes and at times we could not afford food.

However, although locked within the borders of our country, we did survive- my generation whose youth was stolen and ripped away. The generation that was deprived of normal life, peace, future, and prosperity. The lost generation. We did survive, but what happened to us? There were harsh electricity cuts. We were cold and I studied among the sound of sirens. Some of us did not have a shelter. When they sounded the alarm and the piercing sound of siren broke the silence, I would quietly stand inside the door frame and wait to see where the bomb would hit. I studied so hard during those electricity cuts frequently interrupted by the sound of sirens. In my country they called the siren "zizela" (the one which goes crazy). When the electricity was out, I would put the book in between three candles to prepare for my exams.

Before it all happened, I was dreaming of America, but the people in my hometown Ruma, Serbia were burning down the American flag at the town centre during the 1999 "Song Kept Us Alive" protest against the NATO bombing of Serbia.



Figure 127: Song kept us alive, 78 days, Ruma town centre, 1999, photograph taken from the archive collection of The County Museum in Ruma, Serbia



Figure 128: 78 days, Ruma town centre, 1999, photograph taken from the archive collection of The County Museum in Ruma, Serbia

I remember my closest cousin tread on some American registration plates. I remember the tin fold under his feet. America was the aggressor. They bombed our country down. They bombed us with depleted uranium. America was the enemy. And I stopped dreaming. I never went to America. I had the privilege of going through the whole ordeal. At the same time, I had the understanding that my hell was nothing in comparison to the hell of the people who lived in Croatia and Bosnia during the war. But then again, hell is hell and who would dare to measure.

I remember loss. It was both physical and mental. Loss was overwhelming. It was the only thing that was always present. Loss was the only thing that never abandoned me. I remember the absence of colours and I remember the absolute despair.

I remember the dark night and the clear starry sky intercepted by the flashing red streaks of light and a stubborn constant warning sound of sirens. The protective air shield transmitted those red rays to prevent NATO air strikes. The interchanging colours produced by the protective air shields, offered the beautiful array of lights with dominant red and yellow which almost resembled fireworks. If one did not know what it was all about, one could even say it looked wonderful.

In one of the nearby villages, Budjanovci, Serbia, one of the NATO aircrafts was tracked and taken down from the sky while the pilot catapulted himself into the surrounding fields. I remember Serbia celebrating this small victory.



Figure 129: 78 days, A bombed down American plane, Budjanovci village, 1999, taken from the archive collection of The County Museum in Ruma, Serbia



Figure 130: 78 days, A bombed down American plane, Budjanovci village, 1999, taken from the archive collection of The County Museum in Ruma, Serbia

21 years later my country did not forget. We did not choose oblivion completely and on what felt like a sunny, care-free day in Belgrade, Serbia, 2021, a country that still faces challenges daily, I could still encounter the original state of buildings after the bombing of the Ministry of Defence and Army of the Republic of Serbia. As in a Serbian popular people's saying "Bilo, ne ponovilo se"(It happened once, let's hope it never happens again), these remainders of what we had gone through and what had once been our reality, are still present in the form of these bombed buildings in the centre of Belgrade which are there to stay, so that the world never forgets the days when one country was dealt with by depleted uranium bombs in an operation ironically called *Merciful Angel*.



Figure 131: Bilo, ne ponovilo se, autoethnographic photographs, 2020, Belgrade city centre, Serbia

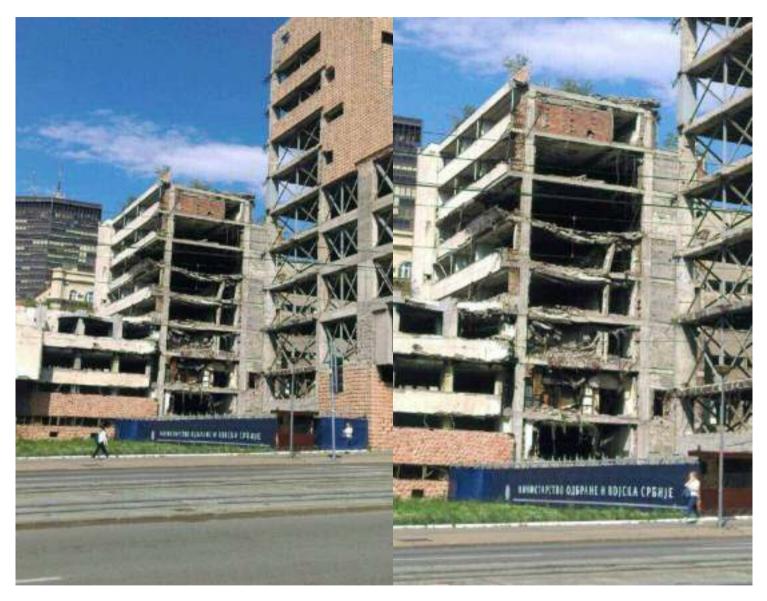


Figure 132: Bilo, ne ponovilo se, autoethnographic photographs, 2020, Belgrade city centre, Serbia

During the *Manchester Roots and Reach Conference* at Manchester Metropole University I won the first prize for the installation which consisted of parts of the painting installation *Loss* and the video *Ena*. This video was made to pose a simple question: "Do they think about the souls of children while they are bombing them? "It is a direct response to my personal experience during the *Merciful Angel* NATO bombing operation of Serbia in 1999. The video is a result of my memories and an attempt to depict the horrible circumstances of the children in Serbia at a time, who were locked within the borders of our country and deprived of normal life. There is a temporal element present, as my daughter Ena, age 12, acts me as a child who survived the horrors of bombing. This video is a global metaphor of war, and it refers to all the victims who experienced bombing with the desire that it never happens to any child in the world again.

Even though I did not present photographic practice, this conference was extremely relevant as it was my first big conference in which I presented my narrative. My success achieved at the conference prompted me to continue actively searching for venues and events in which to showcase my research.



#PGRROOTS



Figure 133: Roots and Reach Conference, Manchester Metropole University, 2020, Manchester UK

Parts of my narrative related to the bombing of Serbia in 1999 were also presented during another important conference, the PARSE, Conference on Violence, Sweden, in the period between 17/11/2021- 19/11/2021



Figure 134: PARSE, Conference on Violence, 2021, Sweden, Available at: https://parsejournal.com/event/the-fourth-biennial-parse-research-conference/ (Accessed 10th October 2023)

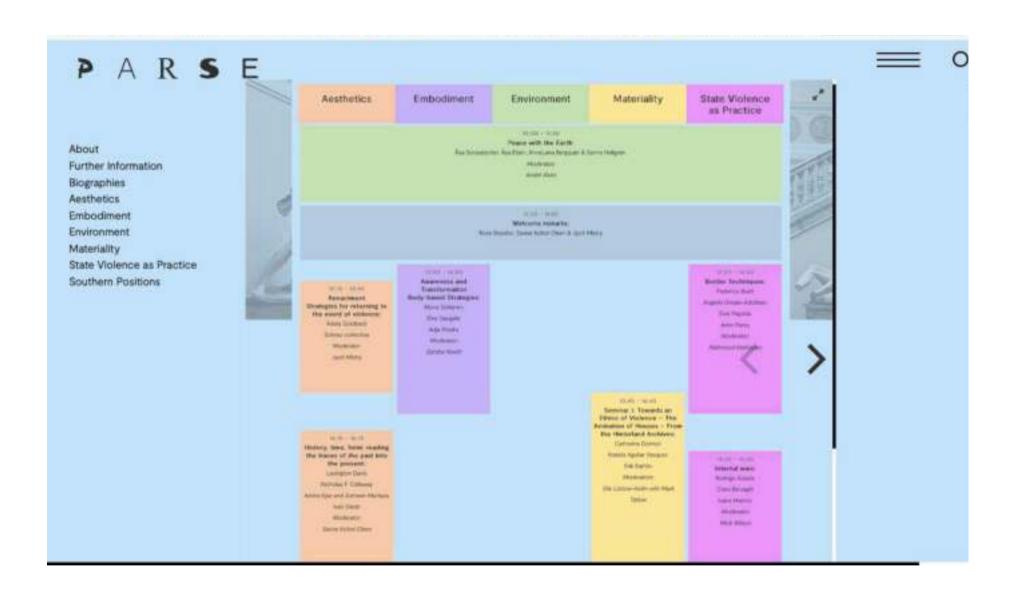


Figure 135: PARSE, Conference on Violence, 2021, Sweden, Available at: https://parsejournal.com/event/the-fourth-biennial-parse-research-conference/ (Accessed 10th October 2023)

1.8 TODAY

1.8.1 29th November 2019: Moments Remembered 15

"I can understand why so many people miss the Yugoslav promise. There was free education and health care, guaranteed jobs, good pensions, and a freedom to travel that was limited by income, but not by passport" (Baric 2020).

Today would have been my country's birthday. 29th November 1943 was the day Yugoslavia was born. She did not last long enough even to live to be an old lady. This period of stability and security that marked the Yugoslav era vanished so quickly. From this temporal and spatial distance, I am very aware of what we have lost. I face our loss to the full degree from behind the till at my catering job at Nottingham Trent University. Today on my dead country's birthday my eyes are wide open. I believe that it was my destiny to come to a land with the implied promise of a better future that the Western system will provide. It was my destiny to encounter, behind the counter, while working as a catering assistant at Nottingham Trent University, all the ruthlessness of the modern reality. Behind the till at the university café is where my dreams died.

People today say that Yugoslavia was an illusion, that it was a construct. I feel as if they are trying to persuade me against something I lived to see. It is as if they are telling me that it was just a dream. It was just a dream to live in a country where there were no job crises, where people were not homeless, where everyone who wanted to work actually could, where people could afford to go to the seaside in summer and skiing in winter, where everyone could afford to buy a house with their salary. From my experience of the insecurity of the modern British capitalism, for me, the institution of a permanent job is near to utopia, even though I possess one of the heaviest degrees- a war degree.

Am I to believe that Yugoslavia was just a dream? I would believe if only I had not lived it, if only I had not had security once. I come from an educated family. I was a teacher in my country. Today, knowing a different possible reality, I start questioning whether I can persuade myself that this is how it should be. We, the children of the glorious Yugoslavia had those couple of years of safety reserved just for us.

Today I read that Yugoslavia had a huge debt after the war regardless of the five-year plan of rebuilding the country. All those people working for free, voluntarily to build mighty Yugoslavia. They managed to build a dream with their bare hands, a dream that was destroyed so easily and abruptly. I feel as if it was stolen from me, betrayed, and abandoned, spat at, disrespected- my Yugoslavia.

Today, even though I am in the UK, in my mind, I am on the raft during the NATO bombing operation *Merciful Angel*. I lived to hear them give the name of mercy to destruction and killing. And I do not want to hear about their reasons. I do not want to hear about the genocidal Serbian nation. When their bombs killed, they kill us all, Serbians, Croatians, Hungarians, and Slovak people. They killed us, ordinary people, although they say that the targets were carefully planned. If that was the case, why did a two-year girl have to die in a residential building? Their excuses make me sick. And indeed, this is our reality- the reality of humanity. The ever-present denial- just because horrors are not happening to everyone, it does not mean they are not real, and no-one can truly understand until they live through them. For many people today, who are so used to social media and to television, reality seems like a movie. We hear about the war in Syria, we see the photos, but we do not understand. Perhaps this all is also just a dream, just a TV show.

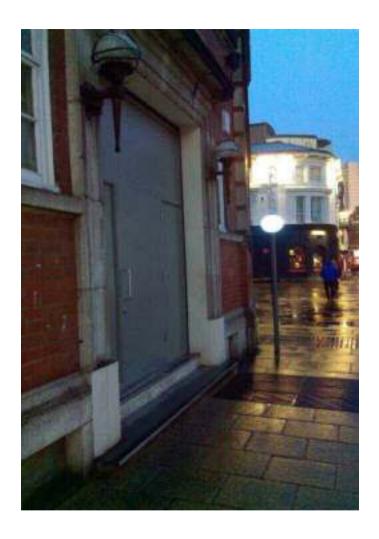


Figure 136: Street as a Home, autoethnographic photograph, 2019, Nottingham, UK



Figure 137: Before You Close Your Eyes, autoethnographic photograph, 2019, Nottingham, UK

I walked to work this morning. In front of the beautiful old Gothic style university building, more precisely just opposite, someone placed flowers. A man slept there, a homeless foreigner. They blocked the stairs on which he slept, sheltered from the wind and rain. They put a metal door to prevent him from sleeping there. And he died to the disgrace of the city council, the note on the wall said. I used to see that man and I would wonder what his story was. The days are getting cold, and I do think about the homeless people. Hypothermia, your heart just stops. Or perhaps I was dreaming. Perhaps it is all just a dream, today on my dead country's birthday.

Aside from pushing heavy trolley with drinks, my job as a catering assistant also includes getting rid of the university rubbish at Nottingham Trent University, where I am a PhD student. On this "rubbish route" I observe the people during the graduation ceremony. Everyone seems shiny to me, with smiling faces. On their big day, different thoughts crawl through my mind. A different perspective is imposed on me, and I cannot seem to forget the other side of reality.

During a conference in Oxford, I met an artist who based her art practice on researching the war in Bosnia and asked her "Did you ever visit Bosnia?" and she said yes. I asked "Why?" because I cannot understand why anyone who has a choice would expose themselves to the horrors they can choose to avoid. "We were always protected", she said. She knew this for a fact, and she recognised the false security and the illusion of safety. This reassured me that I am not alone in this exploration into misery and research into the horror I faced, and this experience brings me to a clearly shaped belief into the illusion of security.

However, the ultimate confirmation that security can really be an illusion, soon arrived to all of us in 2019, and twenty years after my country got bombed, the world faces a different kind of crisis. As people all over the world are being exposed to the threat of coronavirus and are forced to isolate and practice social distancing, some of them have started experiencing a fear which the Yugoslav nation had been through already. What I see now is reminiscent of what I already experienced: mass hysteria, fear for survival, people fighting for toilet paper- the peak of irony of contemporary society. Thirty years ago, in Serbia under sanctions, there were empty shelves in supermarkets and serious food shortages. In the streets people were fighting for bread, similar to how people are fighting over toilet paper today. Overall chaos, fear and a bitter taste of disaster are what connects these two timeframes, and there is this sense of humanity being doomed. Thirty years ago, the hungry people of Serbia were struggling to survive, and hunger does not choose means. In crises like these, there are stories of noble and generous people willing to help others, but the truth is that at times like these, fear frequently blocks generosity. I learnt this when I was still just a child. Most people would do anything just to survive. In the light of tempting circumstances, the human race unveils its true nature. I ask myself whether once we looked fear in the eyes, would we forget all the divine traits that make us human? Would we stop being noble and lose sense of shame? At that final stage of loss of dignity, we would fight over a roll of toilet paper in the supermarket.

Today I understand why I feel this deep sickness in the core of my essence. At times I wish I never chose to deal with the inner demons because writing about them gives them power and they become alive again. I understand now why many of us, the citizens of Serbia, chose this collective denial. Mine and the souls of my parents, friends, neighbours, our psychological beings were filled to the top with misery and despair, and then depleted again, left empty, devastated, only to make room for the next misery that the future would bring. For me, this constant exposure to stressful events, to challenges of survival brought a hallucinatory state of living. My reality became an understanding that I have survived, that we are alive, that bad things are behind us. Today, to me, it seems like even though the ordinary citizens of my country like me, got so tired of revolutions, we are still repetitively forced into them. I see how our past two decades went through us like a series of storms. While trying not to notice the rise of various political parties in Serbia today, I always encounter the same story, as the Serbian proverb would say "Sjasi Kurta da uzjasi Murta" (The more things change, the more they stay the same, or literally Kurta gets off the horse so Murta can get on). In Tito's time, people were willing to work for free and

they truly believed that they were building their own country. If anyone watches the news from Tito's period, all they will hear is progress, hard work, industrial achievements, prosperity, and some of it was true. Today, how can I believe the words of the Prime Minister about the progress in my hometown Ruma, Serbia, that I read in the newspaper. I can recognise this communist narrative about prosperity and some of it might be true, but at the same time, I can see how ex-Yugoslav public properties are being privatised and how state ownership is falling into foreign investors' hands and Serbin citizens are working for ridiculous salaries.

Today, people work only for survival and again the politicians are those who have good lives. If someone wants a job, they need to be in the governing party, therefore, we have a term "stranacko zaposljavanje"- political party employment and the people who do not want to be engaged in political activities of the governing party can only get temporary jobs, with an employment contract in a duration of a month or two (Vuckovic 2019). For me and my friends and colleagues in Serbia, corruption is a normal part of life today. Most of my friends are having difficulties getting employed and some of my colleagues, young teachers who are not in permanent employment, had to join the ruling party and support it in various rallies or be engaged in various voluntary activities, such as visiting households to enquire about people's voting preferences or distributing advertising material. I have personally experienced this and have witnessed their stories and I am not surprised to learn that many young people in Serbia are finding various ways of escape by moving out of Serbia in search of a better future. Now, most of my friends, at least those who managed to get out, live in different countries around the world and I only get to see them for Christmas and summer holidays. "Brain drain" is often used when discussing the amount of young, educated people who leave Serbia, and the current trend is 4000 people a month and around 50 000 a year (Vidovic 2019).

From this distance, as a foreigner in the UK, I have this opportunity to feel and see the whole sorrow, the whole overwhelming reality, all the bleakness of it. At the same time, I felt shocked and frozen by my inability to adjust on my arrival to Nottingham and I had an overwhelming feeling of isolation followed by the piercing loneliness even when surrounded by other people. My first months were marked by rambling through the empty streets, changing rooms and accommodations, and trying to achieve the basic sense of security. I could not even open a bank account that easily, as even banks asked for a credit check. How is it possible to provide it as a foreigner who has no track record of living in the UK? I encountered the same obstacle when in search for a house. It felt as if I had never existed before and more than ever, I felt torn inside, in a never-ending search for belonging.

Associations with childhood memories, the memories of being exposed to war, would occasionally emerge in the constant struggle to find a home. Today, I sometimes cry when I think about what life could have been if only Yugoslavia did not disappear in flames, to the point of no return. I sometimes dream about safety, and I imagine what life might have been like for me. I sometimes dream of what it would be like to live in Yugoslavia, if it remained whole, strong, and unified. I sometimes wonder what life would be like if my father could have protected me, if he did not die so hideously and prematurely. I sometimes dream the unlived dream, my dream of communism, the false promise given to us, our place under the rainbow. Today, in the UK I am, again, the witness of the fact that a sense of security is indeed an illusion. It is an illusion that relates to everyone, everyone in the world. The corona virus does not care whether you are rich or poor. The only thing that money can do is make the days of isolation more pleasant or the days of illness more bearable. Regardless of the social inequality, from my experience I see a mirror, I can relate to the idea of how the virus might be here to teach us a lesson, to warn us not to ever forget these thin layers of frailty of human existence, to teach us that we might as well forget about our arrogance, that we are to requestion our priorities and that we still have the time to focus on who we are supposed to be- compassionate and caring human beings.



Figure 138: Defeated, autoethnographic photograph, 2020, road close to Stejanovci village, Serbia



Figure 139: Memory of a past struggle, autoethnographic photograph, 2020, road close to Stejanovci village, Serbia

There is a connection between the psychoanalytic work on dreams by Freud through his attempts to unravel unconscious and archaeology, as both disciplines allow analytic and conceptual uncovering of the past (Rendell, 2008). Quoting Rendell (2001) "At this moment, the present is allowed access to the past and a glimpse of the future. It is the coming together in one instant of what 'has been' and what is 'not yet'. . . "

My research into the past and the intersection with present, using site writing is more than just an exploration of history.

Place as a starting point of site writing tells us more than just history. My place is more than just a place. It is a starting point of my, at times, unconscious associations evoked by the place itself. The events surrounding the various places where Yugoslavia once was, captivate my mind and I feel them in the core of my being. It is a mixture of feelings of sickness, sadness, and compassion. My research into 'Chasing ghosts' resembles the sunflowers on the side of the road next to the monument to the exchange prisoners of the Second World War. This site close to Ruma, my hometown, commemorates a place where Germany officially recognised the Partisan movement, prior to the birth of Yugoslavia. My research into ghosts drags me deep into their existence, into their hopes, into struggles for their lives, as in the case of both Serbian and German soldiers. I feel their sorrow so deep as if it is mine. That is what writing autoethnographic site writing feels like while reading about these ghosts, seeing these photos, bringing their destinies home, drinking coffee with them, making lunch with them, sharing my days with them, feeling how futile their struggles were, now when they are almost forgotten. Time took its course and after the Second World War, a new war - the Yugoslav Civil war happened to us, to bring an end to all the efforts of creating Yugoslavia.

Quoting Cvjetic (2017) "So much sorrow, faith, hard work, renunciation, desire, zeal, individual deaths, so much bravery, arrests, beatings, assassinations, manifests, armies, declarations, so much love, pride, bandages and gauzes, blood and iodine, relays and cockades ("kokarda"- Serbian coat of arms), five pointed stars and chessboards ("sahovnica"- Croatian coat of arms), so many oaths, guards, camping, voluntary work, flags, songs, tanks and helmets, guns, mines, workers' resorts at the seaside, happy coal miners, foreign students, prison time, so many maps and people, so many languages in one major, so many great writers in today's non-existent Serbo-Croatian language. It disappeared, like Yiddish or Latin, went into thin air, into a smoke and into another bottle. The country was huge, all its people in one state. How to explain Yugoslavia to someone today?"

How do I perceive these ghosts in the history book of the ex-Yugoslav era? There is no place for all these people who were killed, war prisoners, those lucky to be exchanged, returning from war, exchanged from the inside, never the same. Disposable. Looking at how those life systems interchanged in the previous 100 years in the Balkan area, I stopped to believe in ideologies. All those struggles, strains, burdens, wars, beliefs. Walking with ghosts is a dangerous task. You are on the verge of insanity. You resemble those sunflowers at the side of the road, but not when they are in their full strength, turning their heads to the sun, each of them one small sun in itself. You resemble them, when in their final stage, when bowing their heads down, tired and burdened by the weight of their heads. Walking with ghosts burns you down, in the same way as the sun ripens the sunflowers. The senselessness of war and human persuasion. How easy it is to die for someone's idea, someone's desire for power. We are all so disposable: the person of power and the victims of their obsession.

The research undertaken today will soon be research into more ghosts, the always present hope, belief in freedom, freedom and right to be alive, only if political circumstances allow it. Only if the powerful ones allow it. At the end of the day, who decides on whether we live or die? These ghosts are whispering to me. They have so much to tell.



Figure 140: They have so much to tell, photograph from my family's personal collection, 2020, Ruma, Serbia (image quality affected by age)