

Postcolonial Memorabilities and Transforming Performativity in Dispersion

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Abstract

This text discusses the Croatian and Bosnian-Herzegovinian cultural circles comparatively, on the background of the remaining interactive traces of three empires, Habsburg, Ottoman, and Yugoslav, which permeated these cultures in the past, on the one side. On the other side, the text discusses the more recent intellectual/artistic dispersions from these national cultures across the Central European territorial and cultural domains. I reconsider the concept of postcolonial in reference to that, as relative to the concepts of both post-imperial and re-national, and as tuned in to my major analytic frameworks of gender and cultural performativity.

On that ground, I attend to the questions of domination and continuity as the shifting patterns and political variables affecting the processes of the present identifications involved in personal, group, ethnic figurations. My analysis evolves around two points: 1. the postcolonial as manifested in the mnemonic work in the cultural production in dispersive moving trajectories 2. the transforming performativity of a creative singular acting that reinscribes these mnemonic traces with the newly produced quality in rhizomatic cultural interactions.

Therefore, I expose domination and continuity as pulsating in the rewritten challenges to the previous or existing structures, providing the mnemonic also with dialogical traits in dissolving the compulsory group memorabilities – as seeing in the examples of literature, art, and theory made in dispersion.

Key words: postcolonialism, memorability, trauma, singular performativity, dispersion

Introduction

I start this text by delineating my own position to the wider topic of the current state of the literary studies in Central Europe, on the one hand. On the other hand, by delineating my position to the terms that I have announced in the text's title. That is: 1. my understanding of the current Central European postcolonial 2. my use of the terms: memorability¹ and performativity² in this context, and 3. the term: dispersion³ that I innovatively introduce and theorize as a distinct social phenomenon.

My background is in comparative literature, philosophy, and arts, my national and formal civic affiliations are Croatian, Bosnian, and American. My work has been evolving through multicontinental trajectories, variously determined by the effects of the former-Yugoslav wars and the prewar/postwar developments in these territories. Recently, my research interests have again involved the area of the Central Europe, as I have started applying my longtime experience and methodologies to the cultural circles that have shaped my early education, cognition, and viewpoints, while thinking also of wider global bearings. Currently, I explore the Croatian and Bosnian-Herzegovinian cultural circles comparatively. On the one hand, on the background of the interactive remaining traces of indeed three empires, Habsburg, Ottoman, and Socialist Yugoslav, that permeated these cultures in the past. On the other hand, on the background of the

¹ Related to memory processes, I use the term "memorability" as ability to memorize and select actively from the memory, and also as the quality/state of being prone to remembering; and the term "mnemonic" as relating to the practice of aiding the memory.

² "Performativity" is first used by the philosopher of language John Austin referring to the capacity of speech/communication to act or to consummate an action – as beyond *iterability*, as the unique occurrence of an act in the here and now, between singular subjects, thus potentially radicalizing the meanings that can emerge. Performativity theory is most notably developed by Judith Butler referring to gender as socially constructed through commonplace speech acts and a nonverbal symbolic communication that are performative and serve to define/maintain identities – which are hence continuously being redefined.

³ Unlike in natural sciences, in social sciences/humanities the term "dispersion" is neither defined in itself nor differentiated from the term "diaspora". I am describing this concept innovatively and elaborating a theory of dispersion as a movement that also refers to cognition/memory/knowledge-production/-dissemination.

more recent intellectual and artistic dispersions from these two entirely differently structured national cultures, Croatian and Bosnian-Herzegovinian – across the European territorial and cultural domains. From this, it also follows that I deem movement as a major determinant of our time, a major potential, and a major critical force. Especially in the wake of collective traumatic events that I have observed in the processes of individual disconnecting from ethnic groups – which has been widely substantiated in crucial cultural, art, and scientific production in dispersion.

In this text, I discuss the term postcolonial in reference to what I have just described, as relative to the concepts of both post-imperial and re-national, and as tuned in to the analytic frameworks of gender and cultural performativity that I have been using throughout my work. On that ground, I attend to the questions of domination and continuity as shifting patterns and political variables that affect the processes of the present identifications⁴ involved in personal, group, or ethnic figurations. My discussion evolves around two points:

1. the postcolonial as manifested in the mnemonic work in the cultural production in dispersive moving trajectories, and
2. the transforming performativity of a creative singular acting that re-inscribes these mnemonic traces with a newly produced quality in rhizomatic cultural interactions.

Therefore, I display domination and continuity as pulsating in the rewritten challenges (to both previous structures and existing structures), which provide the mnemonic also with dialogical traits in thawing compulsory group memorabilities. They also contest the prospects of the ethnic cohesiveness based largely on ethnic trauma-heritage (from three 20th century wars). Further, I argue for the internationalization of the experience of ethnic injury – by a dispersive plurimedial semioticization in cultural production – that has a political dimension of creative interaction. I will also delineate the main points of my current project that elaborates a novel theory of dispersion.

⁴ The composite units within any concrete ethnicity, nation, or state all exact a variety of identifications in their personal and collective identity building.

The Postcolonial Revisited

The basic definition of postcolonialism, as inaugurated by Edward Said (1978)⁵, renders it as a cultural legacy of colonialism and imperialism, focusing on the human consequences of the control and exploitation of the colonized, as a critical-theory-analysis of that specific history-politics-culture-discourse-literature-art. As such, postcolonial-ism is a response to the dogmatic belief-system of colonialist thought, and has taken sway across the planet in demonstrating the ever-invasive power-practices of empires. Yet also, in interpretations, such power-practices are observed as extended to or permeating those of nations and re-nations alike, which has more recently been translated into the key concerns of the post-imperial studies and the studies in re-nationalization or nation-building.⁶ Historically analogically, however, I understand the postcolonial thought also as comparable to the 1990s rise of trauma studies that have explored the impact of trauma on society and literature. The theorization of cultural trauma has ranged from the by-the-Freudian-thought-backed un-representability of extreme suffering as challenging the limits of language, even rupturing all meaning (Shoshana Felman 1992, Cathy Caruth 1996) on the one hand. And on the other hand, to some more critical, present-reality-based stances (inaugurated by Dominick LaCapra 1994, 2004, or Juliet Mitchell 2000), alongside the simultaneous decisive re-inscription of trauma experiences with gender performativity or nomadism (notably by Judith Butler 1993, 1997, 2004 or Rosi Braidotti 1994, 2011).

This analogy displayed – between the studies of the effects of colonization and the studies of the effects of trauma⁷ – I take as the platform for my research of the layered mnemonic traces in

⁵ See Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1975).

⁶ On post-imperial studies see e.g. Judson 2016, Kozuchowski 2013, Osterhammel 2009, Howe 2009, Spencer 2008, Münkler 2005, Barkey and von Hagen 1997, Brubacker 1995. – On nation-building see e.g. Mylonas (2017); Wimmer (2018).

⁷ I have opened the dialogue between the memories of the Holocaust and postcolonialism already in the 1990s in my congress presentations/publications and my doctoral dissertation. See some titles by Festić in the bibliography. The comprehensive theoretical work on that topic is more recently provided by Michael Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization* (Stanford: Stanford UP 2009).

the current Croatian and Bosnian-Herzegovinian cultural production comparatively. Yet, even more prolific research-ground is offered by the cultural production that manifests the (post-)1990s dispersive migratory movements from these two countries (forced or voluntary), which is the focus of this text, and one of the references for my current elaboration of a wider, globally applicable framework of dispersion theory. Alongside that, I aim to point out to the dead-alleys of the recent or still domineering processes of (what I observe as) a “competitive trauma management”. That is, what is specifically related to various forms of colonization, and undertaken both internally from within and between these two national cultures, or also any other related national cultures.

Writing about the post-Yugoslav theory, literatures, and arts, in some way all related to the ex-Yugoslav grounds, it is indicative to say that even the very word “(ex-)Yugoslav” was hurtful,⁸ difficult, and problematic for me to use it in my subsequent-to-the-war scholarship. I was very much affected by the violence of the pre-war/war 1990s developments, like many others, who were affected in equal or much worse ways. Until recently, when I have pressed myself to contemplate thoroughly about multiple contexts that had produced Yugoslavia (in its positive and negative aspects), alongside the horrific “side-effects” of the crash of that – what is by now often called – historically constructed “mistake”. The Socialist Federative Republic of Yugoslavia had various features in common with the previous Imperial reigns on the same territories. It has already commonly been apprehended as the last multiethnic Empire,⁹ and its dissolution only “the final stage in the breakdown of the Habsburg and Ottoman Empires”.¹⁰ Whether we denote the succeeding 1990s’- and post-processes of the political reconfigurations as postcolonial or post-imperial, relative to these three empires, they all come down to be read as discharging of the beleaguered ethnic memorabilities. For me, that has clearly indicated the need for specifying,

⁸ On the politically- and symbolically-ambiguous post-war use of the expression “ex-Yugoslav”, and the terms “hurtful”/ “safe memories” that I coined, see Fatima Festić, ‘Coming to Terms with Horror: The Ghosts of the ex-Yugoslav War and Psycho-politics after Communism’, Mouton de Gruyter, Chinese Semiotic Studies (2015), 11(2): 181-203.

⁹ See Gale Stokes, *The Walls Came Tumbling Down: The Collapse of Communism in Eastern Europe* (Oxford: Oxford UP 1993). Karen Barkey, Karen; Mark von Hagen, Mark (eds.), *After Empire: Multiethnic Societies and Nation Building. The Soviet Union and the Russian, Ottoman and Habsburg Empires* (New York/London: Routledge 2018). Bojan Baskar, ‘Ambivalent Dealings with an Imperial Past: the Habsburg Legacy and New Nationhood in ex-Yugoslavia’ (Wien, Wittgenstein 2000 Working Papers, Band 10, Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften/Wien 2003).

¹⁰ Anna Foteva, *Do the Balkans Begin in Vienna? The Geopolitical and Imaginary Borders between the Balkan and the Europe* (New York, Washington, Bern: Peter Lang, 2014), p. 12.

analyzing and theorizing the prospects of the individual and personal memory of the lives lived there as differing from their strictly ethnic bases, and of the dispersive movement of the subjects of such memory. And also, I look in the individualized post-memory¹¹ of the various, previously often interlocked and/or reactionary cultural (ethnic) traumas preserved through generations – throughout the aftermath of these three Empires.

Very useful for my discussion is 2014 book *Do the Balkans Begin in Vienna? The Geopolitical and Imaginary Borders between the Balkans and the Europe*, by a younger Macedonian scholar Anna Foteva. She writes that only historically delayed until the 1990s was the “enforcement of national identities and state building through violent exclusion of those who did not belong to the own group”, the processes typical for postcolonial states.¹² Foteva’s detailed analyses of the political and religiously-fed currents – that have indeed concerned also the Central Europe as the extension of the Balkans, if one reads the book’s title¹³ the other way around, i.e. pertaining to migratory routes (from the East to the West) – indicate and foster the relationship between the postcolonial and post-imperial studies. As I read this relationship, the historical analogy/coincidence of the postcolonial studies with trauma studies is replicated by the historical analogy/coincidence of the post-imperialist studies with the rise of performativity studies (also transmuted into nomadism thought) in the past two decades of the 21st century. And further: a new perspective has opened on the inherent “dialogue between the concepts of nationhood and the ideas of the empire” (for example, by Pieter Judson 2016)¹⁴ at the level of the socio-political analysis in social sciences. And, also a new perspective has opened on rewriting a trauma with performativity at the (also gender) levels of the linguistic, philosophic, and artistic in the studies of humanities.

¹¹ Post-memory is a term introduced by Marianne Hirsch/Leo Spitzer to describe the relationship that the “generation(s) after” bears to the personal/collective/cultural trauma of those who came before – to experiences they “remember” only by means of the stories/images/behaviors among which they grew up. These experiences were transmitted to them so deeply and affectively as to seem to constitute memories in their own right. Post-memory’s connection to the past is thus mediated not by recall but by imaginative investment/projection/creation.

¹² Foteva, *ibid*, p. 12.

¹³ In the 19th c. the Austrian chancellor Metternich was quoted to have said that “the Balkans start at the Rennweg” (Wien).

¹⁴ Pieter Judson, *The Habsburg Empire. A New History* (Cambridge MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard UP 2016), p. 9–10.

Within such a widened range of understanding and research – with its deeply contrasting, often exclusionary assembled memorabilities – postcolonialism is opening up to re-inscriptions of both the rooted mnemonic traces and the emerging quality of the rhizomatic cultural interactions. The European Union's *Weltanschauung* itself can be taken as the most progressive step¹⁵ in comparison to the previous political formats of the member-states (imperial, colonial, national-ist, socialist[-federative]); or, rather critically as yet another exploitatively envisioned practice of the mainstream ideology of progress of those in rule. In both cases, however, the currently produced thought, literatures and arts in the European Union's territories decisively tend to work through dogmatic canons of the past and present alike. The mainstream and migratory cultures are merging inevitably, also in the Central European territories (more or less extended to the European West or East), as I will exemplify in my comparative approaches to some of the Croatian and Bosnian-Herzegovinian migratory cultural production.

Heterogenous Memorabilities

The three calamities of the 20th century Europe – 1. the Great War (ending the reign of several empires) 2. (its “nationalized” extension to) the WWII and 3. the (ex-)Yugoslav wars (their belated replica) – prompted the series of severely critical academic reconsiderations of the meaning of ethnicity, nation, statehood, migrations. Also, of the value of human life, memory, and enterprise, throughout the past hundred years. That is how some new scientific disciplines are generated, alongside various cultural/academic testimonies and artistic production. The grounds of Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina were immensely affected by all these calamities. However, in the 1990s' wars, these two countries (their statehoods stemming from the medieval times), were exposed to the devious, horrific military aggressions by their (own) Yugoslav-preserving Serbian-co-nationals both from the outside and within the country-borders. These aggressions clearly endorsed the Imperialist character of Yugoslavia, that in its third format¹⁶

¹⁵ For example, see Ulrich Beck, *Cosmopolitan Europe* (2007); or Ben Rosamond, *Theories of European Integration* (2000).

¹⁶ There were three formats of Yugoslavia 1. the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenians 1918-1929 2. Kingdom of Yugoslavia 3. from 1945 Federal People's Republic of Yugoslavia, with the later changed name Socialist Federative Republic of Yugoslavia through 1991, when the Serbian led Yugoslav Army forces violently tried to stop the state's peaceful disintegration into separate republics.

failed and crashed at last. The pre-Yugoslav imperial reigns on their territories, Habsburg and Ottoman, in various ways through centuries inscribed the colonial beings of the ethnicities, their faiths, local rules, destinies, and individual human psychologies alike. The imprints of the colonial yoke of the foreign regulative and ruling structures were preserved in the symbolic forms in folklore, mythologies, literatures, arts¹⁷ – often mutually very contrarily within each of the ethnicities. That was especially the case in Bosnia-Herzegovina with its formatively and constitutionally more complex and variegated populations than in Croatia, as religion was the determinant factor of each of the ethnicities.

The “Muslimness” as imported imperially from the Turks into the majority-population introduced Oriental scripts and languages in the service of the Ottoman reigns. That shaped the population with a thoroughly new cultural-civilizational codification that has persisted through today, modified/adjusted variably in/to the subsequent systems. Traumatic in the historical experience and in the imagination of the neighboring Catholic and Orthodox Christians, this Oriental dimension then became the target of both Croatian and Serbian 19th century nationalizing movements. Both claimed the naturalized Muslim Bosnian population to be their own – yet mostly through the requirement of the disowning of their religiously-informed-Muslim-identity.¹⁸ Subsequently, in all three 20th century wars, the so called “*phantom* Muslim population”¹⁹ was threatened to be eradicated. Croatian nationals rooted in Croatian Catholicism were firmly shielded by the Austro-Hungarian structures (the Serbian nationals by the orthodoxy ties to the Russian-Empire, later its-communist-USSR-extension, and Russian-Federation through today). Hence, certainly, Croatian official postcolonial responses to their largely accepted or integrated Austrian/Habsburg legacy (and somewhat more menacing Hungarian one) differed from their postcolonial responses to the Ottoman structures in their repulsion of the most of the Turkish traits and remains. Bosnia-Herzegovina has indeed been largely multiply indebted

¹⁷ The admirable canon of Croatian literature through centuries was largely produced also as the depiction of the resistance to foreign invaders and/or rulers: Turks, Venetians, Hungarians, Italians, etc. In Bosnia-Herzegovina the literary production since the medieval times followed multiple paths pertaining to contrary religious-group-nation identifications, so the contrary depictions of the Ottomans, Habsburgs, Russian Empire, and the subsequent political formats such as (ex-)Yugoslavia.

¹⁸ See Edin Hajdarpašić, *Whose Bosnia? Nationalism and the Political Imagination in the Balkans, 1840–1914* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 2015).

¹⁹ Such have been the persistent claims e.g. of Alain Badiou or Slavoj Žižek throughout their work until today.

to the short period of the Austro-Hungarian rule (1875-1914), in the economic, industrial, cultural, urban, and civic sense. Although, paradoxically, the country produced and accommodated the assassinator-cell of the much beneficial Empire (the cell influenced by the radical-left Russians). However, the 1990s' wars and their aftermath marked out both Croatian and Bosnian-Herzegovinian postcolonial memory layers and spaces with the shared or common severe responses to the preceding, ex-Yugoslav centralized, military internal-colonization of "its own" constitutional ethnicities. Yet, also to the procedures of each other's – Croatian and Bosnian-Herzegovinian – painfully differently won independencies.²⁰

In my approach to the current dialogue between the memorabilities of the various colonial traces that have largely effectuated and shaped Croatian and Bosnian-Herzegovinian national beings, I am looking into dissenting memories of the critical creative cultural subjects in their singular moving, or – *dispersion*. That is, I am tracing the ability for mnemonic acting in individuals departing not only from their "autochthonous" groups or lands, but also from an immersion in the realm of the solely own group traumas and recollections of violence, or also the conventional formats of testimony and witnessing. And further, I am tracing a deeper theoretical, cultural and artistic understanding of the continuing dynamics of the effects of imperialization, (post-)colonization, and nationalization alike – indeed in any of the subsequent political formats. I indicate that such activities contribute to resolving the "states of injury"²¹ and renegotiating of identities, community borders, and layers of memory, which is the core of the contemporary European project (as defined, for example, by Ann Rigney²²). I explore the routes of the individual interactions with the plurimediality of the imaginary and artsapes as found and cognized in migration.

²⁰ The Croatian War of Independence was fought 1991-1995 between Croat forces on behalf of the government of Croatia that had declared independence from the SFRY/the Serb-controlled Yugoslav People's Army (JNA). The Bosnian-Muslim population in Croatia fought on the side of the Croatian liberators. Unlike that, in Bosnia-Herzegovina (BiH), after the initial cooperation of the Bosnian-Croatian/Bosnian-Muslim forces in defending the country from the JNA/Serbian para-military, various internal/external factors separated them, turning the sides against each other, which also produced considerable casualties. BiH reached the end of the war only after the very compromising American brokered Dayton Peace Agreement was signed, which legally/administratively separated the country internally between the three ethnic groups into two loosely functioning entities.

²¹ See Wendy Brown *States of Injury* (1995).

²² See Ann Rigney 'Transforming Memory and the European Project' (2012).

In a comparative recontextualization of socio-cultural dispersiveness from Croatia and from Bosnia-Herzegovina, I reexamine the work of the prominent European cultural performers from two generations whose work is distinguished by major (EU/world) awards. The first notable common feature of their work is the ability to transgress the point of “origin,” with the contemporary awareness that, starting with language, there is no notion of original that holds. Among others, these are Vladimir Biti (theorist, comparatist Vienna), Jasna Šamić (Orientalist, writer, theatre-producer Paris), Dubravka Ugrešić (Russist, writer Amsterdam), Dževad Karahasan (writer, teatrologist Graz), Ena Sendjarević (filmmaker Amsterdam), Danis Tanović (filmmaker Paris), Ivana Franke (visual artist Berlin). They all are prominent negotiators of the interactive cultural domains, although with a complex, or sometimes mutually contrary argumentation, reflecting their views of the various forms of the former colonization, as I exemplify in this text. In my cross-reading of their production, I display how they rework the obligatory points of their ethnic memorability, and weigh their composite mnemonic practices with the matters of their newly embraced settings/environments, and contemplate the global in their composite yet affirmative ethico-political moves.

An esteemed Croatian theorist, himself a mixed product of several cultural and ethnic settings from the former Yugoslav territories (Croatian, Jewish, Yugoslav [partly Muslim in-laws]), Vladimir Biti has recently ventured in “tracing global democracy” (2017).²³ On the background of his understanding of the structure and effects of trauma as generative for cosmopolitan ideas of literature and their impact on wider political configurations, he speaks out from the current paradigm of the global. Integrating the late 20th/21st European and American theoretical, cultural, and socio-political perspectives on the dialectics of various conceptions of otherness, Biti analyzes the sources of the supposedly universalizing projects – as stemming from 18th/19th century (e.g. French or German) authors’ own “disconcertedness”. Widely utilizing Said’s very materialist term “dispossession”, Biti “diagnoses” the (that time) prominent “injured subjects” as reactionary narrating self-healers from their various losses – which further debates the political impact of the very meaning of cosmopolitanism. In the similar manner, the other authors that I

²³ Vladimir Biti, *Tracing Global Democracy: Literature, Theory, and the Politics of Trauma* (2017).

discuss offer critical understandings of the cultural consequences of nationalization, regionalization, Europeanization alike.

Coming from the same Croatian academic milieu as Biti does, also of a complex background (Croatian, Bulgarian, Yugoslav), a successful writer already in the pre-war time, Dubravka Ugrešić has been very ambiguously read in her 1990s/and-post essayistic and fictional Yugoslav lamentation. For example, in her 1996 depiction of “The Culture of Lies”, her discussion of the ethical duty of the anti-nationalist dimension of intellectualism in the most challenging times in the “ex-Yugoslav” territories was subverted by her failure to criticize the Yugoslav dystopia. That is, the powerfully ideological, catastrophically failed “Yugoslav” construction that allowed for Ugrešić’s one-sided criticism of nationalism in her nationally-revived homeland of Croatia. Ambiguously read was also her skilfully written 2004 novel “The Ministry of Pain”²⁴, bringing to light the existential and psychological hardship of the youth refugees in Amsterdam after the breakup of the common socialist state, while also revitalizing that very Yugoslav state from Ugrešić’s own personal rather soothing memories. Indeed, the narrative displays her quite idealized/ privileged memories of Yugoslavia as a destroyed “common” constellation, which was not common at all. That very constellation in reality led to such imponderable casualties during its breakup precisely because of its persistent neglect of the much wider historical, social, and cultural structures, complexities, contexts, languages, and knowledges.

Much criticized was also Ugrešić’s academic/theoretical neglect of the historical sources and effects of the mass-sexual violence committed in the 1990s’s wars on the ethnic/religious bases. That is what I reproach to Ugrešić’s work, as for me that has remained the most critical topic pertaining to the fall /breakup of Yugoslavia, and where I see her own feminist insufficiency. Precisely because those crimes have forcefully revitalized biology as the key element of the ethnic, while largely leaving unprosecuted that specific ethnic-genocidal-mass-crime-program and its-devisers/perpetrators, and also leaving the specific ethnic-gender basis of the crime scholarly under-theorized. Ugrešić pursues the much-needed societal-leftist topics, yet always rooted in her former privileged Serbo-Croat structures of the world she lost. It is necessary to say

²⁴ Dubravka Ugrešić, *Kultura laži* 1996; *Muzej bezuvjetne predaje* (1998); *Ministarstvo boli* (2004); *Nikog nema doma* (2005); *Europa u Sepiji* (2013); *Lisica* (2017).

that alongside some Croatian (Catholic) victims, particularly notorious crimes were committed mostly over (50 000) thousands of Bosnian Muslim girls and women. They were seen as the symbolic remnants of the alien body of the pre-Yugoslav Ottoman Empire, the assumed “purity” (allegedly “repressed” woman’s sexuality) of a neighboring-yet-foreign, internally-regulative religious script.

Nevertheless, Ugrešić’s later narrative production provides her “personalized” ex-Yugoslav experience (or nostalgic fixation)²⁵ with another backdrop with her further disillusioned Europeanness’ expectations. In her novel “Europe in Sepia”, further she probes the current omnipresent phenomenon of various nostalgias), as well as in her reconsideration of the Croat-ness as “homeness” in her most recent novel “Fox” (as yet another common uncanny “emblem” inhabiting any homeness today). The way I read Ugrešić’s later work, it shows how the writer’s maturity in her longer-time dispersed condition reintegrates the previous phases in which her narrative healing of her own trauma (of the “departed” Yugoslav state) prevented her understanding of the causes of the others’ simultaneous much harsher immediate traumas, personal or collective. Also, prevented was the understanding of the Yugoslav state as being yet another merciless political empire, succeeding the previous realms of the Habsburgs and Ottomans, although in the left-wing direction.

That again is one of the key Biti’s claims about the ideology of trauma-politics in general. And that is where I see the necessity for introducing intersectionality as the most apt analytic framework pertaining to complex issues of gender, ethnicity, class, race, etc., that itself only further variegates in a consideration of the multiple and shifting postcolonial/post-imperial memory layers. Such intersectionality also further elucidates the double-bind of the class and ethnic concerns or their clashes in one’s script or production. That is applicable to the work of Biti and Ugrešić, who both have considerably maintained their leftist orientation of the kind which was formatted by their socialist Yugoslav years. However, that political orientation was not enough considerate of its various differently internally structured cultural-body-entities and their societal concerns. At a more recent point in their production, both of these authors come to

²⁵ See, e.g. Slaven Letica’ criticism of Ugrešić (and several other feminists) as overtly betraying Croatia in his flagrant text “Croatian Feminists are Raping Croatia”, in: *Globus* (12.11.1992), p. 41–42.

realize and thematize the importance of the dynamics (and politics) of the alien to them cultural or ethnic flows after years of their own work in dispersion, and that is what is noteworthy in their work.

Shifting Patterns, Political Variables

Proposing a theory of dispersion, I define the concept of social dispersion as distinct from diaspora since it describes the movement of individuals rather than groups. As such, dispersion refers to both movement and knowledge production/dissemination; it implies the transforming function of memory and its political materialization. I employ the insights of nomadic philosophy at the intersection of the studies of moving and studies of memory – exploring the relation of dispersion to memory production in literature, other art-media, and theory. I start with the focus on the dispersions that are close to my experience and knowledge: from the here discussed two (post-)war departure-points, Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina. These have connected yet composite “origins”, very different conceptions of nation, historically/politically mutable forms of cultural memory, and currently diverging paths in the European political configurations. After the bloody wars of disentanglement from Yugoslavia, Croatia has gained independence, and it was awarded the European Union membership in 2013. At the same time, the fully-legally-dissected (by the American-brokered Peace Agreement)²⁶ Bosnia-Herzegovina still cannot envision even the opening of the initial chapters in the talks of joining the European Union. Hence, these two provide excellent cases of parallel dispersion processes with contrarily informed individual practices composed through axes of movement that involve reactions to three main causes of the 20th century European ordeals. Such singular acting is not searched meticulously, considering that there have been abundant discussions of memory’s collective

²⁶ Dayton Peace Agreement (reached at Air Force Base, Dayton, OH, Nov. 1, 1995, signed in Paris, Dec. 14, 1995), ending the 3 1/2-year-long Bosnian-Herzegovinian (BiH) War in the separation of the-1000-years-existing-statehood of Bosnia-Herzegovina into the religiously-based-ethnicities parts: a loose Federation of Bosnian Muslims (Bosniaks) and Croats (Catholics), plus the Serbian (Orthodox Christian) entity. See Belloni, Roberto, *State Building and International Intervention in Bosnia* (2007). Or, Festić, Ibrahim: Rat, mir i pravo u Bosni i Hercegovini (*The War, Peace, and Law in BiH*), Sarajevo: Pravni Fakultet u Sarajevu 2004, on Yugoslav War 1991–1995, Bosnia-Herzegovina, politics and government from 1992.

features,²⁷ especially in terms of traumatic histories,²⁸ recently implied in the restored significance of nations and borders.²⁹ That is why I am focusing on the dispersive movement of a critical creative cultural subject that uses memory as a transforming political (inter)action. It is particularly challenging to search this process comparatively in dispersions from the above specified two countries, locating the similarities and differences in the stratum of the mnemonic and the performing embodiment of thought in the authors that I discuss. The “spoken departures” from two post-socialist yet also multiply post-imperialist countries point to the articulation of the individual capacities in challenging the prevailing patterns of simplified cohesive group or ethnic narratives and canons. Further, they illuminate the critical part of dispersion in empowering and demarcating transnational paths within a workable European integrity, particularly in supporting the complementarity of the elements of the regional and global, rhizomatic and rooted.

If looking from this angle, the questions of domination and continuity in the contemporary European spaces are posed not only from the side of the (post)colonial/(post-)imperial or the nation-state/national-ethnic or the post-national European Union entities. More significantly, they are posed in the format of the political variables that travel and mutate through all of these entities and as such affect the processes of the present identifications involved in personal, group, or ethnic figurations from within each entity. As I show on some studied examples, the authors also tend to work through a specific trauma heritage that belongs to one ethnicity with their conceptual, artistic, or theoretical tools, so as to introduce empathetic inter-ethnic dialogues into most painful group memories.

²⁷ See, for example, *Memory Unbound: Tracing the Dynamics of Memory Studies*, Lucy Bond, Stef Craps, Pieter Vermeulen, eds. (2017). Or, *Cultural Memory Studies: An International and Interdisciplinary Handbook*. Astrid Erll and Ansgar Nünning eds. (2008). Or, Jeffrey K. Olick, *The Politics of Regret: On Collective Memory and Historical Responsibility* (2007). Or, Andreas Huyssen, *Present Pasts: Urban Palimpsests and the Politics of Memory* (2003).

²⁸ Michael Rothberg ‘Multidirectional Memory in Migratory Settings’ (2014); *Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization* (2009). Or, Selma Leydessorff *Surviving the Bosnian Genocide: The Women of Srebrenica Speak*. 2015. Or, *The Generation of Postmemory*. Marianne Hirsch 2012. Or, *Acts of Memory: Cultural Recall in the Present*, Mieke Bal and Leo Spitzer eds. (1999)

²⁹ Manlio Graziano, *What is a Border?* (2018); *Transnational Memory: Circulation, Articulation, Scales*, Chiara De Cesari and Ann Rigney, eds. (2014).

A younger Croatian/Berliner artist, Ivana Franke's stunning installation "*Srebrenica 1995–2015*" – the light-and-sound performance commemorating the genocide committed in Bosnia³⁰ – unwaveringly reintroduces in the public space the effect of a primordial uncanniness inherent in any ethnicity. The performance reintroduces the uncanniness into-the-darkened-then-by-the-flashing-sparkles-growing-noise-infused-audience, facing the image of a forest on the stage, as well as the real forest both surrounding them and awakened in themselves. The question with which all the spectators cannot but terrify themselves is how it is to be executed in their own holding their human *irresponsibility* for that particular mass-execution having been committed at all (particularly as themselves they were related to the same-war-events and the Yugoslav-army-terror). Originally, the 2015 performance is shown in the outdoor Zagreb theatre Tuškanac, produced with the assistance of Sena Kulenović (Bosnian/Croatian, text) and Carl Michael von Hausswolff (German, sound). Franke sets up a ghostly apparition of the mass-crime of imponderable dimensions, with the performers' torchlights-on-the-move that gradually enlighten as well as blind the audience. There is no spectators' catharsis, each of them unearthing one's own inner forest as reflecting the outside forest of the numbing disappearance (of the memory) of the human element. One has to take/internalize the thus produced disquiet as one's own inextinguishable torch. *Which one is one's ethnos in the flame of the sparkle?* – that is what I read as an eternal question which has only got sharper as reminding of all wild political rotations throughout the past century in Europe, and elsewhere.

Artworks like this clearly labor for the internationalization of the experience of ethnic injury, crucially working through the concept of *ethnos* towards the concept of *ethos*, and clearly intervening in dubious political operations of the current "ethnic trauma managements". In developing a theory of dispersion, my main objective is to describe the role of a dispersive singular intervention into the prevalence of horrifying, hurtful, grieving mnemonic referents as performing a cultural (and political) change, alongside wider heritage preservation. I claim that *there is no identity that is not identification* – this simple insight can indicate the continuation of the European idea and European heritage perhaps more thoroughly than any idea of nation. That

³⁰ On July 11/12 July, (so far identified) 8700 Muslim men were killed by the Serbian soldiers in the protected enclave zone guarded by the Dutch UNPROFOR battalion.

is how dispersive cultural plurimedial semioticization re-inscribes the national bodies that in the South Eastern Europe have only appeared as the “violent reminder of the contradictions of (the European) modernity”³¹ – in their belatedly undertaken “final working out of long European tradition of a violent ethnic homogenization driven by the formations of nation-state”.³² Hence, they have gravely faced the contemporary Europe (and its Union) with its own responsibility for still repressing the memory of the various violent stages of its own near past.

Another example is Danis Tanović’s 2001 film “No Man’s Land”,³³ a critical parable of the disgraceful role of the international community in the Bosnian (or any other) war developments on the backdrop of the non-sense of the (nevertheless in the centuries rooted) inter-ethnic hatred, based on one’s group “identity”. The hatred which, as having been trapped amidst the filmic murdering in the battlefield, at the end extinguishes also itself. Tanović probes the issue of roots, departing in his artwork from the demands of (re)constituting his own Bosnian-Muslim identity as a basic ethnic-national concern in rebuilding the Bosnian state-texture out of its tormented and repressed ethnic-history layers. He opens the palette of interethnic questions that point to the ethical necessity also of self-alienation toward comprehending the (ethnic and human) other in the immediate post-violence time.

This is also why in my theoretical approach nomadic philosophy³⁴ and its rhizomatic structures³⁵ are crucial to understanding and developing the current political configurations in Europe, with all its bitterly complex national-political legacies. Nomadic philosophy has its best bet in its proposal of affirmative ethics, based on nomadic affectedness, taken from Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, and further developed by Rosi Braidotti. As Braidotti says,

³¹ See Taylor, Charles, ‘Nationalism and Modernity’, in: *The Morality of Nationalism*, ed by Robert McKim, Jeff McMahan (Oxford: Oxford UP 1997), pp. 31–32.

³² See Gale Stokes, ‘Containing Nationalisms: Solution in the Balkans’, *Problems of Post Communism* 46.4 (July-Aug 1999), pp. 3–10.

³³ Danis Tanović’s 2001 feature movie ‘No Man’s Land’ won Oscar for the best foreign film in 2002.

³⁴ Launched by Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari; further developed particularly by Rosi Braidotti.

³⁵ Rhizome is a philosophical concept by Deleuze/Guattari, see *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (1972–1980). Deleuze calls it an “image of thought”, based on the botanical rhizome, apprehending multiplicities. As a mode of knowledge, model for society, the terms “rhizome” and “rhizomatic” describe theory and research that allows for multiple, non-hierarchical entry/exit-points in data representation/interpretation. That is, opposite to an arborescent (hierarchic, tree-like) conception of knowledge, which works with dualist categories and binary choices.

“affirmative ethics is not about the avoidance of pain, but rather about transcending the resignation and passivity that ensue from being hurt, lost, and dispossessed. One has to become ethical, as opposed to applying moral rules and protocols as a form of self-protection.”³⁶ I myself have always understood *ethics as a laboring process*, often a hard, painful movement toward a productive solution that includes reworking of memories. As we all confront multiple limitations, nomadic affirmative ethics helps with its emphasis on complex ethical interrelations to various others as encouraged by motion, change, and transformation. Likewise, nomadic affectivity helps memory detach from negativity in the rerouted creative drive, as Braidotti’s concept of “nomadic memory” takes on. It is from this theoretical platform that I approach the intellectual and artistic production specified in this text so as to discern the political figurations of dispersiveness. That is, the affirmative powers and qualitative modifications in creative transference as crystalizing out of two historically riven South East European contexts that – altered in new settings, as a result (and capacity) – can still endorse “sameness”. Since in transcultural memory studies the immediate post-violence foci are still largely on trauma or commemoration, it is important to point to a more critical understanding of memory as provided by a dispersive cultural production as I define it. That is, memory as always striving to flow into a transformation. Departing from “moral registers” of suffering, victimhood, and mourning as primary constituents of memorability,³⁷ the discussed authors offer rewritten challenges to both previous structures and existing structures of domination and continuity. Hence their work supports also my theoretical elaboration of dispersion.

Performativity in Dispersion

A crucial issue related to the post-Yugoslav literatures, theory, and arts produced in migration from Croatia and Bosnia Herzegovina in various foreign languages also is the authors’ national language memory (of the very similar Croatian and Bosnian, yet also Serbian). Indeed, that is the language memory both separate and shared, as that has been variably determined by political, state, and religious frameworks in various periods in these territories as well as by internally

³⁶ Rosi Braidotti, *Transposition: On Nomadic Ethics* (Cambridge/Malden Polity Press 2006), p 84.

³⁷ See Aleida Assman, Andreas Huyssen, Ann Rigney, Astrid Erl, Rosanne Kennedy.

diversified cultural/gender potencies and susceptibilities-to-belonging-and-ways-of-expression. Based in Paris, the (ex-)Bosnian scholar in Oriental cultures, expert in Turkish literature, Jasna Šamić³⁸ writes books and produces plays (such as *Trois histoires un destin*) in French, the language of her adopted, post-Yugoslav locality, which is also a very apt/involved analytic language for the orientalist fields and topics. Alongside that, she has been revisiting her native Bosnian language in her simultaneous Sarajevo-based production that relates to her rich pre-war academic and artistic endeavors in that town. Notable are Šamić's 2006 *L'Amoureux des oiseaux*, a collection of poetry and short stories, for example. Or, her autobiographic novel, 2013 *L'Empire des ombres*, in which she reflects on her own intimate past family bonds in Sarajevo, the wider Yugoslav political dimensions, the war in the 1990s, and the motives from her new Parisian habitus.

Being of the same generation and quite a close Western European habitation, Dubravka Ugrešić has kept writing in Croatian with gradually disappearing Serbian tinge/nuances throughout the course of her narrative production. Ugrešić's Amsterdam fellow, and significantly of the Bosnian background, Ena Sendijarević³⁹ represents the forcefully displaced subsequent generation, hence artistically she articulates the post-memory of the 1990s developments. Now integrated/educated in the European Union, Sendijarević prods its burning issues in collaboration with her Dutch and other colleagues, writing scripts and shooting documentaries in Western European languages. Renowned is her short film "*Fernweh*" (2014), on the topic of the child's homelessness/foster-home/home, and the topic of the share in wider human traumas of illnesses and social (non-)adaptations. Or, her "*Reizigers in de Nacht*" (2013) that delves into a parable of a woman's fragility in the hardship of her night-shift work exposure (at a gas-station). In her 2019 coming-of-age feature movie "Take me Somewhere Nice," Sendijarević connects her "adopted" languages to her "native" language(s), topics, and perspectives, depicting a Dutch girl of a Bosnian descendent who travels to her ailing father she never met, to her troubled past "homeland", where she connects to the local coevals in a road escapade. The film revisits the

³⁸ See J. Šamić 2006 *L'Amoureux des oiseaux*; 2009 *Anniversaire*; 2013 *L'Empire des ombres*; 1996 *Le pavillon bosniaque: novel*, 1996 *Histoire inachevée; Portrait de Balthazar* 2012; *Le givre et la cendre* 2015; *Trois histoires un destin (pièces de théâtre)* 2016; *Les contrées des âmes errantes* 2019. *Dans le lit d'un rêve* 2017. And in Bosnian: Jasna Šamić, *Mozart* (novel) 2013; *Svjetlo mraka* (poetry) 2018.

³⁹ Ena Sendijarević, *Take me Somewhere Nice* (2018); *Import* (2016); *Fernweh* (2014) *Travelers into Night* (2013).

cluster of migration-identity-belonging alongside the cultural and social differences between Northern/Southeast Europe, telling of all those of complicated and mixed backgrounds who are uprooted while also unsafe in their new localities. It is indicative that these three women authors display the question of (ethnic) heterogeneity also on some other scales, pertaining to imperialisms on another paradigm – where gender features creatively rhizomatically also as a critical means for weighing language issues.

On the other hand, symptomatic is Vladimir Biti's outstanding production in English in the past decade (much less he wrote in German, although he has lived/worked in Vienna as the Chair in South Slavistics). Previously, for three decades his mainstream publishing was in Croatian language (as he was the Chair in Literary Theory at the Croaticistics in Zagreb, where he introduced most of the contemporary world literary and theoretical streams, including psychoanalysis, feminism, trauma, postcolonialism). Also, Biti's 2014 "Reexamining the National-Philological Legacy: Quest for a New Paradigm?"⁴⁰ announces most topics of his subsequent books on the effects/modes of dispossession.⁴¹ Simultaneously, this work decisively marks out new horizons for studying literatures in not only post-national but also post-multinational European spaces. Furthermore, unlike the major stream of Croatian intellectuals, Biti symptomatically reconnects Croatia to the Balkans as his postcolonial reflection on the common background of the various colonial pasts of the region, alongside his grateful academic recognition of Croatia's current European Union profile.

For a comparison, Biti's ex-Yugoslav, and "Austrian" fellow, a successful writer Dževad Karahasan,⁴² writing in Bosnian, spreads out an entirely different sheet of the post-imperial legacy, with his heavy load of the Turkish and Oriental motives and their roots and rhizomes. These also entail their "re-imperializing" benefits, including the marketing of Karahasan's work in the Western Europe. Gender-wise, he offers a very problematic/conservative treatment of this legacy as ignorant of the basic causes, concerns, postulates, claims of the half a century of the

⁴⁰ Vladimir Biti, *Reexamining the National-Philological Legacy: Quest for a New Paradigm?* (2014)

⁴¹ Vladimir Biti, *Attached to Dispossession: Sacrificial Narratives in Post-imperial Europe* (2018); *Claiming the Dispossession: The Politics of Hi/Storytelling in Post-imperial Europe* (2017).

⁴² Dževad Karahasan, *Što pepeo priča* (The Solace of the Night Sky), Sarajevo: Simurg Media (2015). *Kuća za Umorne. Pjesme o ljubavi u smrti* (A House of the Wearied), Beograd: Zadužbina Petar Kočić (2015).

development of women's studies in the world academia. Nevertheless, Karahasan's literary enterprises show his narrative mastery in interrogating, for example, the elements of the rigid ruling Ottoman structures in the Middle East in his 2015 novel "The Solace of the Night Sky". In his 2015 collection of stories "A House of the Wearied," Karahasan also skillfully interrogates the end of the Habsburg reign in the prospect of yet another incoming rigid structures of the radical European left, influenced by the Russians. In these two male producers, their preferred working languages, Croatian/ English and Bosnian/German indeed work against the grain of also each other's production – as the linguistic means of their raising and breaking the rules in favor of or against various contemporary political or cultural ideologies. Hence, their linguistic options make the cross-dialogue of their readings particularly telling of the multiply traumatic legacies of the previous reigning regimes and these authors' quite contrary yet constructive attempts at healing them.

The dynamics of the processes of intellectual, artistic, and linguistic identifications hence points to what from today's perspective most crucially structures heterogeneous memorabilities. It makes possible the active swapping of the various streams of the memorized colonial traces: those pertaining to the post-memory of the Habsburg, or Ottoman, or Yugoslav (or other) Empires. These evolving dynamic interactive platforms enable what in my current work I conceptualize as "dispersive mediated witnessing". That is, the cultural subjects' singular creative ability of speaking from one's both recent and deeper mnemonic layers, while also integrating and signifying the encountered-in-migration symbolic, artwork, and topics. Hence, they are dissolving the inherited or experienced compulsiveness to perpetuate what is indeed a hurtful group memorability – in documenting the hurts only of one's own ethnic "origin". An intrinsic feature of performativity is such transforming, engaged act with the effect of social change that in nomadic subjects only gets more intensified. Such mediated witnessing also advances the emerging ideas on witnessing-testimony-authenticity-mediation produced in culture (for example, in Sarah Jones 2018, or Katherine Roseau 2017, and other scholars around the recently launched journal "New History")⁴³. History comes with its hurts (of its equally or

⁴³ For example, see Sara Jones, "Mediated Immediacy: Constructing Authentic Testimony in Audio-visual Media" in the journal "Rethinking History". Volume 21 2017.

unequally targeted subjects). However, it is the ability to transform history's troubled legacies that distinguishes a critical, creative human subject out of the darkness of the history's forests that otherwise threaten to evolve into everyone's inner dark forest, too. Or, at best, to get frozen in yet another "Angelus Novus" (Walter Benjamin's pre-WWII 1940 description of Paul Klee's post-WWI 1920 pictured "dead-alley of progress")⁴⁴. In my interpretation, Ivana Franke suggestively reminds us that that was the case of Srebrenica: a belated symptom of the European modernity's repetitive negligence of the multiplied-through-centuries-effects of its drives into its own "heart of darkness".

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⁴⁴ Walter Benjamin, The ninth thesis of the 1940 essay "Theses on the Philosophy of History", in *Illuminations*.

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